

THE PREPARATION AND DELIVERY OF
EXPOSITORY DOCTRINAL SERMONS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	vi
Abstract.....	vii
Chapter 1 - Identification of the Problem	1
Introduction to the Study	1
Purpose of the Study	5
Importance of the Study.....	6
Outline of the Study.....	8
Chapter 2 – Theological Framework for Doctrinal Preaching.....	10
The Bible, the Preacher, and the Teacher	10
The Bible and the Teacher	16
The Bible and Teaching.....	19
The Pentateuch.....	20
History.....	23
Wisdom.....	25
Prophecy	26
The Gospels	27
Acts	36
The Epistles.....	43
The Role of the Doctrinal Preacher	45
The Doctrinal Preacher is a Shepherd.....	45
The Doctrinal Preacher is a Slave.....	46
The Doctrinal Preacher is a Servant.....	47
The Doctrinal Preacher is a Sentry	48
The Doctrinal Preacher is a Steward.....	49
The Function of Doctrinal Preaching.....	50
Doctrinal Preaching is Scripture-Based.....	50
Doctrinal Preaching is Serious.....	51
Doctrinal Preaching is Spiritual	52
Doctrinal Preaching is Solemn.....	52
Doctrinal Preaching is Sincere.....	54
Doctrinal Preaching must be Sustained	54
Doctrinal Preaching can Split	57
Apocalyptic.....	59
Chapter 3 – Literature Review of Doctrinal Preaching	60
Introduction to Doctrinal Preaching.....	60
Doctrine and Jonathan Edwards.....	60
Doctrine and John Newton.....	64
Doctrine and Today’s Preacher.....	66
The Value of Doctrinal Preaching	68
Doctrinal Preaching is Important.....	69
Doctrinal Preaching is Relational	72

Doctrinal Preaching is Relevant.....	73
Doctrinal Preaching is Experiential	82
Doctrinal Preaching is Applicable	84
Doctrinal Preaching is Educational.....	84
The Difficulty of Doctrinal Preaching	86
Obstacles in Theologians	86
Obstacles in the Individual.....	92
Obstacles in the Church	105
Obstacles in the Preacher	111
Preparing a Doctrinal Sermon.....	112
Finding Doctrine	114
Preaching Doctrine from a Concordance.....	115
Preaching Doctrine from Biblical Illustrations	118
Preaching Doctrine from Confessions and Catechisms	121
Preaching Doctrine from the Church Calendar.....	122
Preaching Doctrine from Church Ordinances or Sacraments	123
Preaching Doctrine from Great Hymns	124
Preaching Doctrine from the Lives of Biblical and Historical Characters	125
Preaching Doctrine from Systematic Theology	127
Preaching Doctrine from Biblical Theology.....	131
Preaching Doctrine from Major Biblical Passages	132
Mining Doctrine.....	135
Mining Doctrine in Didactic Passages.....	135
Mining Doctrine in Narrative Passages	137
Ten Questions to Ask.....	140
Universalizing Doctrine	151
Doctrine and Church Growth.....	151
Making Doctrine Understandable	156
Decontextualizing Ourselves	159
Decontextualizing Biblical Statements	160
Particularizing Doctrine	162
Exegeting Our Culture	164
Truly Relevant Doctrine	166
The Doctrinal Sermon.....	171
Expository-Textual Sermons	172
Expository-Passage Sermons	175
Exegetical Preaching.....	176
Expository-Thematic Sermons.....	177
Narrative Sermons	178
Didactic Form versus Narrative Form	180
Digestible Doctrinal Sermons	181
Ensure Movement in the Sermon.....	182
Begin the Sermon in a Way that Engages Interest and Suggests Importance	183
Clearly Define the Theological Topic.....	184
Give the Theological Theme a Face	184
Call Attention to Denominational Perspective	185

Tell Stories that Bring Theology to Life.....	186
Suggest Connections Between Theology and The Everyday World.....	187
Deal Seriously with Questions.....	187
Name Your Own Convictions.....	188
Embody the Sermon in an Engaging Way.....	189
The Objectives of Doctrinal Preaching.....	190
The Effects of Doctrinal Preaching.....	191
Planning for Doctrinal Preaching.....	193
The Benefits of Planning your Sermons.....	193
Planning Doctrinal Sermons.....	196
Chapter 4 – The Project.....	199
The Teaching Plan.....	199
Prerequisites.....	200
Instructional Outcome.....	200
Instructional Goals.....	200
Instructional Objectives.....	200
Class Teaching Notes.....	201
Introduction.....	201
Goal #1: Students will learn how to prepare a doctrinal sermon.....	201
Objective #1: Students will recite the definition of doctrinal preaching in their own words.....	201
Objective #2: Students will recognize and state the subject/complement and the doctrine presented in various biblical texts.....	203
Objective #3: Students will define and practice the process of universalizing and particularizing doctrine.....	203
Goal #2: Students will learn how to deliver a doctrinal sermon.....	205
Objective #1: Students will differentiate between various sermon forms and explain how doctrinal sermons fit within each one.....	205
Objective #2: Students will list methods necessary to present comprehensible and applicable doctrine.....	206
Chapter 5 – Conclusions.....	207
Introduction.....	207
Student Evaluations.....	209
Personal Evaluation.....	212
Selected Bibliography.....	214
Vita.....	224

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ABSTRACT

Many Christians today are not only uninformed about basic theology but are even hostile towards it. As Grenz and Olson tell us in their book, *Who Needs Theology?*, the problem is not with theology. The problem is with the theologians – both in the pulpit and in the pews. The pastor/theologian has a theology, though it is often guided by tradition instead of Scripture. The theologian in the pew must be taught the truth by the theologian in the pulpit. Al Mohler writes that “every pastor is called to be a theologian.”

It is therefore imperative that the pastor preach doctrinal sermons. The process of preparing a doctrinal sermon is similar in essence to any sermon providing exposition of a scriptural text. However, there are certain aspects of the doctrinal sermon that require special attention.

In this thesis the reader will learn the biblical basis for teaching doctrine and preaching doctrinal sermons. Chapter one will present the problem that exists in evangelicalism with the neglect of doctrinal preaching. In chapter two, the theological framework will be provided. In chapter three, the author provides a literary review that brings to light what other scholars, pastors and theologians are writing about the teaching of doctrine in the church. Chapter four will suggest for the reader a teaching plan for instructing a beginning homiletics class on the subject of doctrinal preaching. Chapter five will present the conclusions and recommendations derived from this thesis project.

Chapter 1 - Identification of the Problem

Introduction to the Study

In the early winter of 2005, Christians across America were thrilled that one of C.S. Lewis' stories of the imaginary land of Narnia was finally being released as a movie. Millions of people saw *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.¹ Even before the movie was released on December 9, 2005, Christian entrepreneurs were calling this movie a great evangelistic opportunity for local churches. Pastors and church leaders were soon inundated with materials to be used to make the most of this opportunity. Pastors were asked to preach sermons and to teach Bible studies based on the movie. Christians were encouraged to invite others to see the movie and to discuss the movie's message with their non-Christian friends, neighbors, and co-workers.

The church I serve, Western Avenue Baptist Church in Statesville, North Carolina, did not take part in any of these endeavors. In fact, the only interaction we had with the film was a message I preached on a Sunday evening outlining the film's theological fuzziness regarding the atonement. It is my contention that the movie clearly presents the ransom theory of the atonement. This theory, originally conceived by Origen, states that the devil made the cross necessary in that Christ was offered to him as a ransom for all of lost humanity.² Christ's sacrifice on the cross was a payment made to the devil, by Jesus, for the salvation of mankind. This theory is based on a

¹ Box Office Mojo, LCC, "2005 Domestic Grosses," 2007, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/yearly/chart/?yr=2005&p=.htm>, (accessed March 9, 2006). The movie ranked third overall in 2005 for box office receipts with \$288,795,833 taken in over 3,800 theaters. George Lucas' latest movie, *Star Wars: Episode III – Revenge of the Sith* was first (\$380,270,577) and *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* was second (\$289,795,853).

² Leon Morris, "Theories of the Atonement," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1984), 100-102.

misunderstanding of Mark 10:45 and 1 Timothy 2:6, which define “ransom” as a fee paid to Satan to purchase the release of sinners.

It must be admitted that Lewis did not intend for his allegory to represent the gospel point for point. In a famous letter to a classroom of Maryland fifth graders, he wrote:

You are mistaken when you think that everything in the books 'represents' something in this world. Things do that in *The Pilgrim's Progress* but . . . I did not say to myself, “Let us represent Jesus as He really is in our world by a Lion in Narnia.” I said, “Let us suppose that there were a land like Narnia and that the Son of God, as he became a Man in our world, became a Lion there, and then imagine what would happen.”³

However, Lewis’s words did not stop some from disregarding his intended purpose. A Wheaton College English professor wrote that “the most important theological fact about *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* is its Christological focus. . . . [It speaks of] an atoning death, [retelling] the story of Christ's passion and resurrection. This story of salvation history is told with theological precision and with a continuous eye on the Gospel accounts of the life and death of Jesus.”⁴

Since many within evangelicalism refused to let the movie remain a simple child’s story, I took the time to address the film during a Sunday evening service. I thought it necessary to explain theological inaccuracies contained within. If the church is determined to use this movie as a presentation of the gospel, then people must be informed that the gospel presented in the film is theologically deficient. The members of our church were amazed to see the theological inaccuracies. To be sure, there was

³ Andrew Coffin, “Narnia,” *World Magazine*, December 10, 2005, n.d., <http://www.worldmag.com/articles/11343>, (accessed March 9, 2006).

⁴ Leland Ryken, as quoted by Steve Camp, “From the Front Row: My Review of the Enchanting Narnia,” *Camp On This*, December 10, 2005, n.d., <http://stevenjcamp.blogspot.com/2005/12/from-front-rowmy-review-of-enchanting.html> (accessed March 9, 2006).

substitution, suffering, death, and resurrection in the film. However, Aslan's substitution could have been made by any non-treacherous habitant of Narnia. Aslan's suffering and death was by the Witch's hand, by the Witch's demands, and at the Witch's insistence. It was a resurrection that occurred because of a mistake made by the Witch.

The ransom theory fell from favor because Scripture does not imply anywhere that Satan is the one to be appeased by sacrifice before sinners can be redeemed. The Bible tells us that Christ's atonement was a sacrifice to God (see Ephesians 5:2 and Isaiah 53:10). Consequently, my advice to the congregation that night was, "Enjoy the film, read your Bibles, and do not confuse the two."

This problem of theological ambiguity is not isolated. Our culture is continually producing works roughly similar to orthodox protestant evangelical Christianity that are able to fool the non-discerning. For example, Mel Gibson's blockbuster movie *The Passion of the Christ* contained numerous apocryphal teachings of the Roman Catholic Church that Protestants would have to denounce if they knew enough to spot them. However, the praise from the evangelical community was astoundingly flattering and enough evangelicals saw that movie to make it America's tenth highest money-making film of all time.⁵

Dan Brown's recent best-selling book, *The Da Vinci Code*, presents a view of history that Jesus married Mary Magdalene and fathered a child. The book further states that the bloodline of Jesus continues to this very day. In an introductory footnote, Brown

⁵ Box Office Mojo, LCC, "All-Time Box Office Domestic Grosses," 2007, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/alltime/domestic.htm> (accessed March 9, 2006).

writes that “all descriptions of documents and secret rituals are accurate.”⁶ Other theses asserted in the novel include:

- Mary Magdalene's womb, carrying Jesus offspring, was the legendary Holy Grail (as seen in Da Vinci's encoded painting, The Last Supper).
- Jesus was not seen as divine by His followers until Emperor Constantine declared Him so for his own purposes.
- The Nicean Council of the third century was the context for Constantine's attempt to obtain more power and the relationship of Magdalene as paramour of Christ was quashed there.
- Mary Magdalene's remains and the secret documents that tell the real story were found on the Temple Mount when Jerusalem was conquered in the First Crusade.
- There is a connection between the Nag Hammadi documents (a.k.a., Gnostic Gospels) discovered in 1945 and this storyline.
- The "truth" about Christ and Mary Magdalene has been kept alive by a secret society named the *Priory of Sion* that was lead by great minds like Da Vinci and Isaac Newton.⁷

A movie based on this book came out on May 19, 2006. The opening weekend of *The Da Vinci Code* ranks as the fourteenth best opening in American movie history, taking in a little more than \$77 million in its first three days.⁸ In the days leading up to the release

⁶ Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 1.

⁷ Byron Barlowe, “The Da Vinci Code: Of Magdalene, Gnostics, the Goddess and the Grail,” *Leadership U*, March 7, 2006, <http://www.leaderu.com/focus/davincicode.html>, (accessed April 14, 2006).

⁸ Box Office Mojo, LCC, “All-Time Box Office Opening Weekends,” 2007, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/alltime/weekends.htm> (accessed June 9, 2006). The initial “Spider-Man” movie is ranked first with over \$114 million in the opening weekend. The aforementioned “The Passion of the Christ” is ranked twelfth with almost \$84 million in its opening weekend.

of this movie, churches were being told to brace themselves for the controversy and to use the opportunity as yet another in the long line of “greatest evangelistic opportunities” of our day.

Purpose of the Study

These episodes demonstrate the importance of teaching and preaching doctrine in our churches. How is the typical church member going to know truth from error, especially when error is presented in such an appealing manner? The answer is found in the oft-told illustration of teaching bank tellers to spot counterfeit bills by focusing entirely on authentic currency. Once tellers clearly recognize the genuine bills, they quickly and easily spot the false bills. In the same way, church members can be taught the truth as presented by Scripture. By preaching doctrinal sermons, our congregants will be able to spot spiritual counterfeits.

This is easier said than done. Millard Erickson and James Heflin wrote that “there have been few times in the history of the church when solid doctrinal preaching and teaching have been more needed. Yet seldom has such preaching been more difficult and problematic.”⁹ The two barriers mentioned by Erickson and Heflin should not keep preachers from preaching doctrinal sermons. Doctrinal sermons can be relevant, practical, easy to understand and unifying.

⁹ Millard J. Erickson and James L. Heflin, *Old Wine in New Wineskins: Doctrinal Preaching in a Changing World*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 9.

Importance of the Study

Ronald J. Allen wrote *Preaching Is Believing* to urge preachers to “give systematic theology a higher profile in preaching.”¹⁰ Early in his book, he lists several reasons why theological preaching is important.¹¹ From Allen’s reasons, we can extrapolate why doctrinal preaching is important, even if the preaching does not follow the outline of systematic theology. Consequently, we can say that there are six reasons why doctrinal preaching should be emphasized in today’s churches.

First, doctrinal preaching helps appropriately shape Christian community. Our theological convictions are what make us who we are. Doctrine shapes how Christians worship, minister, serve and live in this world. Doctrinal preaching forces us to define what we believe about certain subjects and how those beliefs impact our daily lives. Doctrinal precision helps the local church think critically about its attitudes, behaviors, policies, and convictions.

Second, people are hungry for doctrine though they may not express their desire in such language. It is doubtful that many parishioners approach their pastors to ask for an explanation of the forensic nature of justification. However, people do have questions about who they are, what they are going to do with their lives, and how they should live their lives. These are spiritual and biblical issues. Doctrinal preaching helps people answer these questions with a biblical interpretation and Christian worldview.

Third, doctrinal preaching helps the church to make sense of the widely divergent theological claims presented in books, magazines, radio, and television. There are a multitude of ideas competing for acceptance by our congregants. Some ideas are

¹⁰ Ronald J. Allen, *Preaching is Believing: The Sermon as Theological Reflection*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 2.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

relatively inane or belong in the order of “intramural discussions.” However, some are potentially devastating to the individual or the entire church body. It is the duty of the pastor to guard his flock from “savage wolves” (Acts 20:27-28).

Fourth, doctrinal preaching helps both the pastor and congregation understand and combat the pluralism of postmodernism. Allen notes that in the past, the modern world was symbolized as a “melting pot.” The individuality was removed as all melted into homogeneity. In the current postmodern world and its concomitant denial of absolutes, the world is more akin to a “salad bowl,” where the various ingredients “retain their individuality but exist alongside one another, and even enhance or support each other.”¹² Doctrinal preaching can help the congregation remain secure in its moorings to the authoritative particularities and absolutes of the biblical faith.

Fifth, doctrinal preaching helps to alleviate theological illiteracy. A large number of those who attend church regularly could be classified as biblically illiterate, unfamiliar with the main themes of Scripture and Christian historical tradition. With this lack of knowledge, they are unable to think biblically regarding the world around them. There are several factors that have led us to this state, and doctrinal preaching alone will not bring us back to theological literacy. However, continuing to dismiss doctrinal preaching is a sure way to hasten the decline.

Sixth, doctrinal preaching helps the preacher honor the integrity of the Bible’s teachings. The Bible is a doctrinal book. To teach “the whole counsel of God” is to teach doctrinally. These doctrines are not laid out neatly in a list but are found in every book of the Bible. It is important to teach the doctrines in their context in order to honor the integrity of the Scripture and to give power and authority to the teaching.

¹² Allen, *Preaching is Believing*, 30.

Outline of the Study

In Chapter Two, I will state the theological principles that provide the foundation for this thesis and provide the preacher with a biblical foundation for the preaching of doctrine. The Bible clearly warns pastors that people will want to have teaching that “tickles their ears,” but they need to know sound doctrine. By giving a brief survey of the Bible’s emphasis on teaching doctrine and the demand placed upon preachers to preach doctrine, this chapter will establish the principle that doctrine should be a central focus in preaching.

In Chapter Three, I will look at what other pastors, scholars, and theologians have written on the subject of doctrinal preaching. It will be assumed that readers know how to prepare biblical messages utilizing Haddon Robinson’s text, *Biblical Preaching*. In learning to preach expository sermons that are doctrinal in nature, pastors must take additional factors into consideration. In Chapter Three, I will explain those particular factors in order to teach preachers the differences between expository preaching and doctrinal expository preaching.

In Chapter Four, I will present a plan to teach the preparation and delivery of doctrinal expository sermons. The sermons that preachers teach today “will be a part of shaping people, churches and missions tomorrow.”¹³ Since doctrine is vital, we must learn to communicate those doctrines so they are learned and retained in our hearts and minds and lived out in our lives. Chapter Five will include generalizations and conclusions reached during the formulation of this thesis and the teaching of the class on doctrinal preaching.

¹³ Ryrie, *Ryrie’s Practical Guide to Communicating Bible Doctrine*, (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2005), 9.

Andrew Blackwood tells the story of a young preacher remembering his first few sermons. The young preacher, James H. Robinson, said:

Once, when I had preached on “The Ontological Argument for the Proof of the Existence of God,” Mrs. Ella Bullock, a devout and motherly deacon, called me to her home the next day and said, “Son, we don’t need all that theology, philosophy, and psychology. We need some ‘peopleology’ and ‘Negro-ology.’ Talk about something we know. Help us to live, young man.” With a kindly laugh, she added, “Talk about something you know something about, too.” I accepted her advice gratefully.¹⁴

Doctrinal preaching does not have to be an “either/or” situation. We can learn a lesson Mr. Robinson had to learn the hard way: doctrinal preaching can be theological and “peopleological.”

¹⁴ Andrew Blackwood, *Doctrinal Preaching for Today*, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), 23.

Chapter 2 – Theological Framework for Doctrinal Preaching

The Bible, as the revelation of God in written form, is a theological book. Each division of the Bible, even the narrative and poetry of the Old Testament, was written to inform us about God. In these pages, we learn of His character and His plan for the redemption of man unfolding through history. For reasons known only to God, He gave the responsibility for recording this revelatory message to human beings. These individuals came in various forms, such as a former idol-worshipper, shepherds, prophets, a grower of fig trees, fishermen, a physician, and kings.

Today, individuals from even more varied walks of life are called to spread this same message. How are we to do so? What is the job of the modern-day messenger of God's Word? In the Scriptures, particularly in the New Testament, we read of two tasks: preaching and teaching.

The Bible, the Preacher, and the Teacher

Paul told Timothy, and by extension today's messengers, to "preach the word" (2 Timothy 4:2). What does it mean to "preach the word?" There are several Greek words used in the New Testament for preaching. One of the most commonly used words is

(*kerysso*). This word means "to cry out loud, declare, announce" and may carry such nuances as "to offer, order, forbid, ask." A general sense is "to make known," though specifically it may also mean "to herald."¹⁵ This word in its other forms includes

(*keryx*, herald or preacher);

(*hierokeryx*, temple herald);

μ

¹⁵Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromily (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 430-435.

(*kerygma*, the message or the proclamation); and προ (prokerysso, to proclaim publicly or beforehand).

Another frequently used word is ευ (euangelizomai), which means “to proclaim good news.”¹⁶ This word in its other forms includes (euangelion, good news, gospel); (euangelistas, evangelist); and προ ευ (proeuangelizoma, to proclaim beforehand).

It is with these two definitions in mind that most people today regard a “preacher.” For most of society and the church, a preacher is a person who speaks, usually passionately, to make known the subject of the gospel of Jesus Christ. A preacher is concerned primarily with getting the message of salvation to a world in need of a savior. These preachers come in all forms – from the shouting sermons of Appalachian tent revivals to the reasoned explanations in mass crusades in large cities.

However, the Bible also speaks of another task for the messenger of God. The Bible tells us that some men went around teaching. As with preaching, there are different Greek words for teaching. The most common term is didaskw (*didasko*), which simply and unambiguously means “to teach.”¹⁷ This word in its various forms include:

(didaskalia, teaching); (didache, teaching); (didaktos, taught); (didatikos, able to teach); (didaskalos, teacher);
μ (nomodidaskalos, teacher of the Law);

¹⁶ Ibid., 267-273.

¹⁷ Ibid., 161-166.

(*kalodidaskalous*, teacher of what is good);

(*pseudodidaskaloi*, false

teacher); and

(*heterodidaskaleo*, to teach strange doctrine).¹⁸

The verb *didaskw* is used some ninety-five times in the New Testament with nearly two-thirds of those occurrences in the Gospels and Acts.¹⁹ In all its grammatical forms, the words in this family appear 177 times in the New Testament, and all but forty-five of those appear in the Gospels and Acts.²⁰ It appears that while the epistles are didactic in nature, the gospels also talk often about the didactic nature of the ministry of Jesus and the apostles.

Jesus and the apostles taught doctrine. Some English versions of the Bible translate the Greek word *didaskalia* (*didaskalia*) as “doctrine.”²¹ This English word “doctrine” was coined by Wycliffe from Jerome’s Latin *Vulgate*.²² Jerome used a word from the Latin verb *docere* (to teach). Specifically, Wycliffe continues this emphasis as a transliteration of the Latin *doctrina*, which means “teaching.”²³

Is there a viable difference between these two functions of the speaker: preaching the gospel and teaching doctrine? A paper by J. Wesley Adams entitled “Preaching and Teaching: An Analysis of their Relationship in the New Testament” was presented at the thirty-fifth annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in Dallas, Texas on December 16, 1983. In this paper, Adams explained that there are two views on the subject among New Testament scholars.

¹⁸ Ibid., 161-166.

¹⁹ Ibid., 162.

²⁰ Manual search using Libronix Digital Library.

²¹ See the King James Version at Matthew 7:28; 16:12; Mark 1:27; 4:2; 7:7.

²² Stanley Malless and Jeffrey McQuain, *Coined By God: Words and Phrases that first Appear in the English Translations of the Bible* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2003), 49.

²³ Allen, *Preaching is Believing*, 13.

Building on the work of C.H. Dodd, Adams wrote that some see preaching and teaching as two distinct roles for the messenger.²⁴ It is noted that the differences between preaching and teaching are two-fold: the persons being addressed and the content of the message. This demarcation between the differing audiences states that preaching is for “those outside the church, those whom the church seeks to evangelize.”²⁵ The message for these “outsiders” also has a very particular content – the *kẖrugma* (*kerygma*), which is the gospel of Jesus Christ that saves.

Some scholars disagree with the position above, saying that teaching is a “distinctly separate activity of the early church.”²⁶ Teaching is intended for a different audience – those already inside the church. Simply put, teaching is for believers. The content is also different. Teaching conveys *didachē* (*didache*), which, as we have seen, is Greek for “the teaching” or “the instruction.” This *didache* is mostly instruction from Jesus and the apostles to believers on how to live their lives and what to believe as truth.

In this bifurcated view of the preaching/teaching ministry, we see that preaching precedes teaching. After the *kerygma* or *euangelion* is proclaimed, then the *didache* is taught to those who accept the prior message. In this sense, individuals would sometimes teach and sometimes preach but never both at the same time.

The contrasting view is that there is no real distinction between the two roles. Instead, they are seen as closely interrelated ministries.²⁷ It is argued that the *kerygma* and the *didache* together make up the *euangelion* (or gospel). Proponents argue that in

²⁴ J. Wesley Adams, “Preaching and Teaching: An Analysis of their Relationship in the New Testament” (paper presented at the 35th annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Dallas, Texas, December 16, 1983), 1.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 2.

²⁷ Ibid., 3.

the communication of this multi-faceted gospel, there is only one message, but there are two methods for communicating that singular content. We see these two combined methods in several places in the New Testament.

In Acts 4:2, the Sadducees were disturbed because the apostles “were teaching () the people and proclaiming () in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.” We notice that same preacher is speaking to the same audience and the content of the message is the same: the resurrection of the dead. After being flogged and ordered not to speak in the name of Jesus any longer, the apostles “kept right on teaching () and preaching (μ) Jesus as the Christ” (Acts 5:42).

Again, we note that the audience is not mentioned, but the content is the same in both teaching and preaching ministries. In Acts 15:35, we read that “Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching () and preaching (μ) with many others also, the word of the Lord.” Here, we note that the audience is the same for both methods of speaking. We do not have any specific information regarding the content of the messages except that the two taught “the word of the Lord.”

After his trial, Luke tells us that Paul “stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him, preaching () the kingdom of God and teaching () concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered” (Acts 28:30-31). In this instance, there is no distinction in the audience, but it appears that there is a distinction in the content. As opposed to Dodd’s view that preaching precedes teaching, it must be noted that in every instance above (except Acts

28:30-31) where the two terms are found together, teaching is mentioned first and seemingly has the priority.

Noting the interrelation of these two terms, Robert H. Mounce suggests that “teaching is basically the detailed explanation of the gospel which is proclaimed in preaching.”²⁸ According to Adams, the most convincing critique of Dodd’s view is by Robert Worley in his book, *Preaching and Teaching in the Earliest Church*. Worley argues that the two terms are interchangeable, with both occurring in a multitude of places amongst a multitude of different peoples.

It appears from these examples and the arguments put forth that there is a difference between the two terms. However, this demarcation is probably not as pronounced as Dodd suggests. At the same time, it is not likely that preaching and teaching are merely different words for the same task. The simple fact that the two terms often appear together in the same verse describing a single act by a single man indicates some level of differentiation, however small.

Adams concludes that the “Old Testament distinction between prophet and priest is our clue to the New Testament distinction between preaching and teaching.”²⁹ He writes that the prophet of the Old Testament was the instrument used by God for proclamation, often saying “Thus says the Lord” (present tense). These prophets dealt brazenly with their culture. At the same time, the priest was also used by God to tell people what God “has spoken” (past tense). This priest or teacher would tell his listeners how to apply the words of God to their lives. The prophet/preacher tells his audience that

²⁸ Robert H. Mounce, *The Essential Nature of New Testament Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1960), 40, quoted in J. Wesley Adams, “Preaching and Teaching,” 5,

²⁹ Adams, “Preaching and Teaching,” 9.

“God says . . . and this requires . . .”³⁰ Preaching relates to the will and demands a response based on action. The priest/teacher tells his audience that “God has spoken . . . and this means . . .”³¹ Teaching relates to the intellect and is intended for devotion and understanding.

In our modern age, then, the pastor must engage in both activities just as the first-century speakers did. We must proclaim or herald the saving gospel of Jesus Christ to those outside the church and, sadly, to those who come regularly to the gatherings of the Body of Christ. At the same time, the herald of the gospel must also instruct or teach his listeners on the ethical expectations of the Scriptures and the doctrinal statements contained therein. To ignore either is to be unbalanced, resulting in an unhealthy congregation. Most pastors are “good at preaching” and even enjoy the task. What must we learn to improve in our teaching?

The Bible and the Teacher

A common preaching mistake today is to transfer the ways and customs of our modern world into the world of the first-century church. It is common to read of the early church and transport our situation into the situation of the text. Today, when the typical church member hears “teacher,” he is more likely to think of a layman in a Sunday School class. Obviously, there were no such conventions in the ancient world. The individual who taught would stand (or sit) before the entire gathered body of believers, just as today’s pastors do in their pulpits on Sunday mornings.

In accordance with the model presented in Scripture, today’s pastor is to preach and teach when he stands to speak. This is easier said than done. Pastoring in the twenty-

³⁰ Ibid., 10.

³¹ Ibid.

first century is a challenge. The role of the pastor is a subject of much confusion in many churches. Some desire their pastor to be a prophet, proclaiming boldly the Word of God in an antagonistic culture. Some want their pastor to be a teacher, who digs deeply into the Word of God uncovering life-changing nuggets that help them understand the Bible and live their lives. Others want their pastor to be a shepherd, visiting sick and hurting members in the hospitals and in their homes. Still others want their pastor to be a leader, making decisions to lead the congregation to ever bigger and better things.

Each of these roles is important, and most pastors must work diligently to balance this workload. Yet, underlying each of these roles is the foundational assumption that the pastor's primary task in the local church is to "[equip] the saints for the work of service" (Ephesians 4:12). Paul wrote to the Christians in Ephesus that God had given "some as apostles and some as prophets and some as evangelists and some as pastors and teachers" (Ephesians 4:11). Today, we might say that apostles are missionaries and prophets are those who speak for God. Evangelists are the bringers of Good News, calling others to Christ. It is interesting that Paul did not say "some as preachers," although that aspect is surely contained within the prophetic ministry, and as we have seen, in the teaching ministry.

Just as there is debate about the terms "preaching" and "teaching," there is also much discussion on the phrase "pastors and teachers" in the passage above. The definite article is used before each of the first three roles and also appears before the role of "pastors." It is absent from "teachers." Some have claimed that this indicates the two were to be conjoined – a "pastor-teacher."³² It is more conceivable that the two positions overlap. All pastors are teachers, but not all teachers are pastors. The single definite

³² John MacArthur, *Ephesians*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 145.

article most likely suggests this type of close association. Another factor suggesting this type of overlap of duty is the use of μ between every office except between pastor and teacher. In this final case, Paul used the word μ (μ , μ).

Paul wrote again to Timothy, instructing the young pastor that “the elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching” (1 Timothy 5:17). Here it seems the elders have many jobs, and some will not work as earnestly in their study as others. However, it seems that all elders will preach and teach in some capacity. In this same letter, Paul lists the qualities of the overseer, and only one qualification relates to a specific function: “able to teach” (1 Timothy 3:2). All other qualities are related to the man’s character.

Paul wrote to another pastor and instructed him in the significance of an elder’s responsibility to teach. He told Titus that “the overseer must be above reproach as God’s steward . . . holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching (μ) so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine (μ) and to refute those who contradict” (Titus 1:7-9). Apparently, even at this early stage in the church’s development, false teaching was such a problem that an essential quality of a pastor was the ability to understand and teach biblical doctrine. This problem still exists today, so Paul’s exhortation to Titus remains applicable.

It is not difficult to imagine Paul speaking to the modern pastor and urging him to consider the importance of this role of the pastor. Many of today’s pastors have listened to advice that requires them to address the felt-needs of their audience and have therefore

shunned the biblical mandate to teach their congregations. The emphasis from Paul's letters to young pastors seems to be on the joining of the pastoral ministry with a teaching ministry.

Today, it is often the pastor alone who is responsible for teaching biblical doctrine in important areas like salvation, baptism and sanctification. It is to our church's detriment and to our shame if we fail to take seriously this responsibility of teaching. Yet, pastors are not called to be officers or CEOs. The pastor's primary concern can never be bigger buildings or larger budgets or even more people. God provides those things. Instead, a pastor should focus on what God has called him to do – teach and equip the body of Christ. Pastors will always be pulled in a multitude of directions but their purpose remains – to preach and teach and to equip others to teach. Churches need doctrinally astute lay teachers to teach Sunday School and other such classes.

Returning to Paul's writings in Ephesians, we find that we are to continue this task “until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). When this goal is achieved, Paul tells us that “we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming” (Ephesians 4:14). Indeed, there is much work to be done.

The Bible and Teaching

The only way to achieve the goal commanded by Paul is to teach the truths found within the pages of the Bible. This simple objective has been the task taken on by teachers throughout the Scriptures. The Bible was written to be taught. In fact, there is not a division of the Bible that does not have some reference to teaching within it. In the

survey that follows, the sheer volume of references to teaching doctrine shows the value placed on this task by the writers of Scripture.

The Pentateuch

When Moses was overextending himself as judge for the people of Israel, his father-in-law Jethro wisely drew him aside for counsel. Jethro told Moses to select able, God-fearing men to serve as judges over the people. This delegation would then allow Moses to do his primary task: “teach them the statutes and the laws, and make known to them the way in which they are to walk and the work they are to do” (Exodus 18:20). Here we see a wonderful example of the interrelation between doctrine and life. Moses taught the Hebrews the statutes of God, and these teachings were to directly influence their lives and their work. Doctrinal preaching and teaching must have the same outcome today in order to avoid the cries of “irrelevance.” Doctrine, contrary to popular opinion, is not solely for the intellect. It is for life.

In Leviticus, we read that God has given commands to Moses for the consecration of Aaron and his sons for the priesthood (Leviticus 8, especially verse 30). In chapter nine, the Lord accepted the offering of Aaron. Later, Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu, offered “unauthorized fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them” (Leviticus 10:1). The Lord consumed both men by fire. Moses then instructed Aaron in the proper duties of the priest in response to this incident. Besides understanding the difference between the holy and the unholy, Moses commanded Aaron to “teach the sons of Israel all the statutes which the LORD has spoken to them through Moses (Leviticus 10:11). This subsequent teaching surely provided the opportunity for exposition as well as application.

Early in Deuteronomy, Moses began to teach the Israelites the Law. He said, “Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I am teaching you to perform, so that you may live and go in and take possession of the land which the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you” (Deuteronomy 4:1). Moses saw a clear connection between his teaching from the Word of God and the people’s lives. He told the people to learn from his teaching so that they could be successful in the task God had called them to complete – taking possession of the land. Once again we see a clear causal relationship between good teaching and proper learning and the subsequent behavior.

One chapter later, Moses rehearses the Ten Commandments with the Israelites. This is pure doctrinal preaching. Moses tells the people what he is about to do: “Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the ordinances which I am speaking today in your hearing” (Deuteronomy 5:1). He then tells them what he expects them to do with this teaching: “learn them and observe them carefully” (Deuteronomy 5:1). After giving the Law, Moses reminded the people of their original response, saying “And you said, ‘. . . speak to us all that the LORD our God speaks to you, and we will hear and do it’” (Deuteronomy 5:24-27; cf. Exodus 24:3). The Lord told Moses that if the people would honor their commitment, all would go well with them. God commanded the people to return to their tents but said to Moses, “But as for you, stand here by Me, that I may speak to you all the commandments and the statutes and the judgments which you shall teach them, that they may observe them in the land which I give them to possess” (Deuteronomy 5:31). God taught Moses. Moses would, in turn, teach the Hebrews.

One chapter later in Deuteronomy, Moses is still teaching the Law to the Israelites. Early in the teaching, Moses told Israelite parents that “These words, which I

am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up” (Deuteronomy 6:7). Teaching the Scriptures was intended to be an everyday part of life, just as one would teach an infant to walk or a son to plant and harvest.

Today many parents leave the theological education of their children in the hands of pastors and other church volunteers for a few hours each week. It would seem that a vital part of today’s preaching ministry would be to teach the doctrines of the Bible to the adults in our churches, proving the relevance of doctrine to life. If we can do this, these adults will be equipped to reinforce these teachings in the minds of the children. It is thrilling to think of what will happen when new generations of biblically literate individuals with a biblical worldview enter into our society after being taught the truths of Scripture by their parents.

Again in Deuteronomy, we read of Moses passing the mantle of leadership to Joshua. Moses was 120 years old. He knew he was about to die and that he would not enter the Promised Land. He had already instructed them to love the Lord and to keep His statutes (Deuteronomy 11); to worship the Lord in holiness (Deuteronomy 12); to dispose of all idols in the land (Deuteronomy 12:29ff); to differentiate between clean and unclean food (Deuteronomy 14); to pay the tithes (Deuteronomy 14:22ff); to observe the Sabbatical year (Deuteronomy 15) and Feasts of Passover, Weeks and Booths (Deuteronomy 16); and to observe various laws regarding priests, judges, kings, warfare, civil crimes, marriage, inheritance, and sexual immorality (Deuteronomy 17-30).

Even after this review, Moses knew the hearts of the people. He knew they were stubborn and would soon enter into rebellion. He called the elders of the tribes and spoke the words of a song to them, saying, “Give ear, O heavens, and let me speak; and let the earth hear the words of my mouth. Let my teaching drop as the rain” (Deuteronomy 32:1-2). Just as the earth needed the slow, constant watering from the rain to thrive, people need the constant teaching of the Bible. As true as this was in the days of Moses, it remains true for people today. We are just as stiff-necked as they – perhaps more so. If not constantly reminded, we forget through this neglect.

History

Early in the divided kingdom, Jehoshaphat continued the spiritual reforms his father, King Asa, had started. The young king sought the Lord and walked according to the Law of God. We read in 2 Chronicles 17:7 and following that in the third year of his reign, he sent his officials, Levites, and others “to teach in the cities of Judah.” In verse nine, we see that this group “taught in Judah, having the book of the law of the LORD with them; and they went throughout all the cities of Judah and taught among the people.” We do not know if they taught the entire Pentateuch or just the Book of Deuteronomy, but we cannot escape noticing that the role of these men was to teach the people the Word of God.

Jehoshaphat wanted reform, and he knew that this change could not be legislated from the throne. Instead, people had to be changed from the inside. This is a critical lesson for today’s pastors to learn. It is common in the last few years for pastors to be called to enter the political arena and to use the power of the “Christian right” to turn America “back to God.” This will never work. Morality cannot be legislated. Rather, the

only way to truly impact America (and the world) is through the preaching and teaching of the truths of Scripture.

In the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, we find the importance of teaching doctrine to God's people. The temple has been rebuilt by God's sovereign hand through the commands of Kings Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes. After the dedication of the Temple, Ezra, a scribe knowledgeable in the Law of Moses, went up to Jerusalem. The Bible tells us that "Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel" (Ezra 7:10). By the call of God and the decree of Artaxerxes, Ezra was to work "according to the wisdom of your God" (Ezra 7:25). He was to appoint judges and magistrates from the people who knew the law, and he was to "teach anyone who [was] ignorant of them" (Ezra 7:25).

In Nehemiah, we read of the account of the rebuilding and dedication of the defensive walls of Jerusalem. After the wall was finished, Nehemiah went through the genealogical records as he led the effort to re-establish the people of Jerusalem. Ezra once again took up the mantle of the teacher. Ezra convened the people of Israel in order to remind the nation of their covenant relationship with God (7:4-13:31). Within this prophetic call, we read in the beginning of the eighth chapter this remarkable teaching:

- 1 And all the people gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the LORD had given to Israel.
- 2 Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women and all who could listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month.
- 3 He read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law.
- 4 Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah,

Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand; and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah and Meshullam on his left hand.

5 Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up.

6 Then Ezra blessed the LORD the great God. And all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

7 Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, explained the law to the people while the people remained in their place.

8 *They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.* (italics mine)

In this instance, the Law was not only read but explained. Ezra and several others taught the people what God was declaring in the books of Moses. Here we see modeled exactly what was written earlier: the prophet Moses spoke for the Lord and the teacher Ezra explained what God told Moses. This illustrates the need for faithful exposition of the Scriptures by individuals who have been trained for just such a task. The listeners were able to understand the teachings of these men and responded appropriately.

Wisdom

Solomon took to heart the words of the Lord from Deuteronomy 6:4, and instructed his sons in the statutes of God. In the Book of Proverbs, Solomon begins the dispensing of wisdom by writing that “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction. Hear, my son, your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching” (Proverbs 1:7-8). Later he repeats his desires, saying, “Hear, O sons, the instruction of a father, and give attention that you may gain understanding, for I give you sound teaching; Do not abandon my instruction” (Proverbs

4:1-2). If only every parent in every church would take this task to heart as seriously as King Solomon!

The Preacher of Ecclesiastes instructed the readers to remember their Creator when they were still young. The text later reads that “in addition to being a wise man, the Preacher also taught ()³³ the people knowledge” (Ecclesiastes 12:9). After all his travels and quests, the writer of Ecclesiastes determined what was important. Wisdom is nothing if it is not passed to a new generation.

Prophecy

Isaiah pronounced judgment on Ephraim and Jerusalem in chapter 28 of his prophecy. Their priests and prophets were drunkards (28:7) and unable to fulfill their duties of teaching. Instead, they were only able to communicate with infantile speech. Isaiah asks “To whom would he teach knowledge and to whom would he interpret the message?” (Isaiah 28:9). The only thing these prophets could teach was babble, saying, “Order on order, order on order, (or “precept upon precept” - ESV), line on line, line on line, a little here, a little there” (Isaiah 28:10). In the Hebrew, these monosyllabic words *Sav lasav, sav lasav, Kav lakav, kav lakav, Ze’ er sham, ze’ er sham* imitate the babbling of a child, mocking the prophet’s preaching.³⁴

Later, the Lord speaks through Isaiah and says that foreign conquerors will be used by God to speak to these people and to teach them “Order on order, order on order, line on line, line on line, a little here, a little there” (Isaiah 28:13). However, this time the teaching will be so that “they may go and stumble backward, be broken, snared and taken captive” (Isaiah 28:13). The LORD responds to their scoffing by imitating their mockery

³³ Septuagint.

³⁴ Zondervan NASB Study Bible: 1995 Update, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 994 (center-column note).

in order to represent the unintelligible language of a foreign conqueror. The teaching of God's Word will have a hardening effect on these stiff-necked people. This is an effect of preaching doctrine today. Similar to Jesus' use of parables as a form of judgment on those who did not have ears to hear, the teaching of doctrine will have the same effect on the hard-hearted within the congregation. These will refuse to submit to the Lord's statutes and will reveal themselves as the hard-hearted or unregenerate church-goers that they are.

The Gospels

As expected, Jesus sets the standard. The public ministry of Jesus began immediately after his time of temptation in the wilderness. Matthew writes that after settling in Capernaum, "Jesus began to preach ()" (Matthew 4:17). His message was succinct yet powerful: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Here we see the *kerygma* voiced in just seven Greek words.

However, just a few verses later, Matthew records that Jesus was "branching out" in his ministry to the populace. The apostle writes that "Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching () in their synagogues and proclaiming () the gospel of the kingdom" (Matthew 4:23). The passage does not tell us the content of this teaching but only that a mainstay of His ministry was His teaching, preaching, and healing.

In the next chapter, Jesus escaped from the crowds to the mountains. He was soon joined by His disciples, and "He opened His mouth and began to teach () them" (Matthew 5:2). In this episode, we do know the content of Jesus' teaching. He taught what we now call the "Sermon on the Mount," beginning with the Beatitudes.

At the conclusion of this sermon, we discover the impact of Christ's words on His audience. Matthew records that "when Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching (); for He was teaching () them as one having authority, and not as their scribes" (Matthew 7:28-29). After this brief message, the crowd was dumbfounded. They were not used to hearing such wisdom and depth from their own teachers. They were also surprised by Jesus' authority. Their scribes always quoted others to lend authority to their words. Jesus referred only to the Scriptures, and in His interpretation of them, referred to no human authors or traditions as He taught them.³⁵ Craig Blomberg says that "such preaching reflects either the height of presumption and heresy or the fact that He was a true spokesman for God, whom we dare not ignore."³⁶ Pastors must ask when speaking doctrinally, "To whom or to what do we appeal?"

We read similar comments about the resultant amazement surrounding Jesus' teaching in Matthew 22:33; Mark 1:22, 27; 11:18 and Luke 4:32. However, Jesus' goal was not to amaze crowds.³⁷ Rather, His goal was to elicit obedience. In the same way, we can be tempted to "wow" our congregation with informational tidbits and to amuse them with well-timed humorous stories. However, our objective must remain the same as Christ's: the transformation of lives to conformity to the gospel.

When compared to what the Jews had been receiving at synagogue, this teaching was revolutionary. In typical fashion, the Pharisees approached Jesus regarding the religious cleanliness of the disciples (Matthew 15:2), accusing the disciples of failing to wash their hands when they ate bread. The text does not give details of the attitude of

³⁵ Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 134.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 135.

³⁷ John MacArthur, *Matthew 1-7* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1985), 488.

Jesus in His response to this accusation, but it is not difficult to discern a sense of frustration and righteous indignation. Jesus called these men hypocrites for focusing on such a small detail in others when their own lives were spiritually shipwrecked. Jesus quoted Isaiah 29:13, saying, “This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far away from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, Teaching () as doctrines () the precepts of men” (Matthew 15:9). The error of the Pharisees was assuming the authority of tradition instead of Scripture. This practice “invalidates Scripture” (Matthew 15:6), and Jesus says that the prophecy in Isaiah is to be directly applied to his immediate audience. The Jewish leaders of Jesus’ day thought they were preserving ancient Scriptural traditions. Instead, these Pharisees were actually “preserving the spirit of those who Isaiah criticized long before.”³⁸ The same can be said to any pastor who preaches his own tradition instead of studying to discover the authorial intent of the biblical writer. It matters little what we think we know about doctrine and theological subjects, we must let the Scriptures speak. To do otherwise is to participate in a practice that Jesus says elevates man’s thinking above God’s thinking. Such teaching is “vain” or “futile” (Matthew 15:9). It matters only what the Bible teaches us in these matters.

It is for this reason that doctrinal teaching should be done in an expository fashion. Doctrinal sermons that are nothing more than a pedagogical listing of abstract ideas, jumping from one acontextual biblical reference to another, are apt for interpretation bound by tradition. Instead, to allow the doctrine to emerge naturally from the exegesis of the text accomplishes two things.

³⁸ D.A. Carson, *Matthew*, ed. Frank E. Gæbelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985), 349

First, preaching expository doctrinal sermons gives the preacher authority when he stands before his people and speaks on even the most controversial doctrines. It is one thing for the preacher to tell his congregation his opinion on a certain subject. They may agree or they may not; the matter is debatable. It is another thing entirely to be able to say with confidence, “Thus says the Lord.” At this point, people disagree with the words of the preacher at their own peril.

Second, preaching expository doctrinal sermons ensures that the pastor does not live within his personal or denominational traditions. A pastor may preach theology from his tradition if the sermon consists of several verses of Scripture taken out of context. However, if the sermon is doctrinal and is based on a single passage of Scripture preached expositionally, the eisegesis of traditions and personal opinions are difficult to maintain. If the speaker chooses to do so in direct defiance of the text, the people are more apt to see the discrepancy.

Mark records many instances of Jesus’ teaching ministry. In Mark 6, Jesus desires rest and retreat with His disciples. The rabbi and His followers traveled by boat, and upon arrival, they “went ashore, [Jesus] saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach () them many things” (Mark 6:34). It is interesting to note how Jesus responded to these peoples’ needs. His compassion led Him to forgo His personal needs for rest and instead to feed the people what they needed – His teaching. It is also interesting to think of what Jesus did *not* give this crowd. In our churches, pastors are called to be the shepherds to similar groups. Just as Jesus shepherded these first-century Jews, today’s pastors must do likewise by teaching them. The people in Jesus’ life did not need to be entertained or

humored. They needed to feed on the very Word of God, taught boldly and unashamedly. People have not changed in two millennia.

In Luke's gospel, the physician writes of one of Jesus' first teaching moments. We read that "Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit . . . and He began teaching () in their synagogues and was praised by all" (Luke 4:15). In Nazareth's synagogue, He stood up to read. This was a customary thing for Jesus to do, according to Luke. He was handed the scroll of Isaiah and opened to what we now know as Isaiah 61.

After reading the first portion of text, Jesus stopped in mid-sentence, closed the scroll, gave it to the attendant, and then sat down to speak. This "incomplete" reading led to the confusion of the listeners that He dispelled with His teaching. Jesus taught them that the words Isaiah had written seven hundred years earlier were being fulfilled before their eyes. Anticipating their skepticism, Jesus proceeded to give an explanation (or *Targum*) in Aramaic. This probably gave rise to the custom of preaching a sermon after a brief reading of Scripture."³⁹

In verse 22, we read that all were speaking well of Him. The mood shifted quickly. At the end of His short exposition, all in the synagogue were "filled with rage" (Luke 4:29). Why? The passage Jesus read was understood as a description of the work of the Messiah when He appeared in Israel. In appealing to the listeners' messianic hopes, Jesus dealt with the two prevailing expectations of the day: (1) every Jew of every

³⁹ Craig A. Evans, *Luke* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1990), 73. (See Acts 2:16-36 and 13:16-41).

generation believed that Messiah was coming within his lifetime; and (2) Messiah would rid Israel of Gentile oppression when He appeared.⁴⁰

In His teaching, Jesus used Elijah and Elisha as illustrations of His ministry. Elijah miraculously provided food for a Gentile widow but provided none for any Israelites also suffering from the famine (1 Kings 17:8-16). Likewise, Elisha healed a Syrian officer named Naaman from leprosy yet healed no Jewish lepers (2 Kings 5:1-14). This was an incredibly bitter reminder to these contemporaries of Jesus, suffering for years under Roman oppression.

Jesus announced that the first expectation of the Jews was fulfilled immediately in their very presence. However, when Jesus announced that no prophet receives honor in his hometown and then spoke of two of Israel's greatest prophets, he contradicted the second expectation. God was not going to rid the land of Gentiles. Instead, God was bringing Gentiles into the kingdom. Just as Elijah and Elisha ministered to non-Jewish people, Jesus will be Messiah to Jews and Gentiles alike.

In this short account, we see that Jesus did not compromise His message. The teaching of Jesus impacted His hearers' emotions as well as their intellect. They understood exactly what He was teaching them, and they responded in the only way they knew. This gives pastors courage to teach even the more challenging texts. The pastor can teach the most difficult doctrines and trust in God to work through the teaching to reach people where they are.

In their rage, those who listened to Jesus' words in the synagogue attempted to drive Him away, but He walked right through them and kept on walking to Capernaum.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 72.

Even more were “amazed at his teaching ()” because He was teaching as one with authority (Luke 4:31).

Later in Luke’s account, we read that while Jesus was walking with two believers after His resurrection, He modeled systematic theological preaching. Luke states that “beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained (μ) to them the things concerning Himself in all the scriptures” (Luke 24:27). Though the Greek word for “teach” is not used here, it is obvious that teaching was occurring. The verb

μ (*hermeneuo*) means “to explain thoroughly, by implication to translate.”⁴¹

The root is found in our English word “hermeneutics.” Jesus is presented as an expositor of the Old Testament.

Outside the synoptic gospels, we find some accounts of note. The teaching ministry of Jesus is not mentioned often in John.⁴² One instance, however, is in chapter seven. Jesus has secretly gone up to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:10). Yet, the story takes a decidedly different turn as John tells us that “in the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and began to teach ()” (John 7:14). As usual, when Jesus taught, He provoked a reaction. In this instance, the people were both astonished and offended.⁴³ The crowd wondered aloud how Jesus could speak so powerfully without a formal education. Jesus replied, “My teaching () is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the

⁴¹ Kittel and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 256-7.

⁴² See John 6:59, 7:14 and 8:20.

⁴³ Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 262.

teaching (), whether it is of God or *whether* I speak from Myself” (John 7:16-17).

Jesus appealed to the ultimate source – God, the “one who sent Him.” His authority was not rooted in the study of the Old Testament, although He appealed to it often. Even less was it rooted in the rabbinical schools of the day.

As Jesus continued to teach, the crowd’s agitation increased. John writes that “Jesus cried out in the temple, teaching () and saying, ‘You both know Me and know where I am from; and I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know. I know Him, because I am from Him, and He sent Me’” (John 7:28-29). Jesus shows that He is a true emissary for God by pointing every listener to the source. As Ridderbos says, “the true [emissary] does not seek ‘his own glory’ but that of the one who sent him (cf. 5:41, 44; 8:50, 54).”⁴⁴

What a wonderful lesson for today’s preacher. It is tempting to prepare messages that bring glory and even fame to the speaker. Public speakers, especially preachers, fight a constant battle with pride. However, our position should be that of Jesus. We should not be concerned that people think we are smart or clever; instead, people under the authority of our preaching should be impressed with God. Expository doctrinal preaching works toward this as we expound on the greatness and goodness of God revealed through Scripture.

After the scathing words of Jesus above, He was arrested and brought before the High Priest. Interestingly, we read that “the high priest then questioned Jesus about His disciples and about His teaching ()” (John 18:19). The Jewish leaders were

⁴⁴ Ibid., 263.

interested in what Jesus had been speaking to the people. Nonetheless, it appears that their interest was still more theological than political.⁴⁵ They clearly saw His message and His doctrines as threats to the spiritual hold they had on the people of Jerusalem. There is power in knowledge, yet there is even more power in the truth.

The apostles and disciples learned well from their master as they went about the country teaching the truths they had learned from Jesus. He had commanded them to do so, saying, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations . . . teaching () them to observe all that I commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20). As

James Boice put it, “for all Christians a lifetime of learning must follow conversion.”⁴⁶ He goes on to explain that this command is particularly vital in our superficial age:

Instead of striving to teach *all* Christ commanded, many are trying to eliminate as much of his teaching as possible, concentrating instead on things that are easily comprehended and unobjectionable. But a core such as this is distorted. It is usually grace without judgment, love without justice, salvation without obedience, and triumph without suffering. The motivation of some of these reductionists may be good: They want to win as many people to Christ as possible. But the method is the world’s, and the results will be the world’s results. Robust disciples are not made by watered-down teaching.⁴⁷

When most of today’s pastors think of “winning the lost to Christ,” it is likely that their first thoughts would be of programs and methods. In many instances, a discussion of evangelism would probably not include the importance of “content.” In direct opposition, Jesus gave the “secret” to winning the world to Christ: teaching His commandments – all of them.

⁴⁵ Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 516.

⁴⁶ James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of Matthew, Volume 2: The Triumph of the King, Matthew 18-28* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 649.

⁴⁷ Ibid. (emphasis in original).

There must be a balance in our preaching between evangelistic appeal and faithful exposition. To put it differently, there must be “outreach” and “inreach.”⁴⁸ It is the responsibility of believers to teach others. But how can they teach what they do not know? Modern Christians must be educated theologically in order to fulfill the Great Commission. This is a vital job of their pastor.

In fact, sometimes the preaching of doctrine can perform a “double-duty.” Thom Rainer, in *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched*, interviewed many individuals who had only recently started attending church. In his research, Rainer discovered several factors that drew these men and women into the church. Surprisingly, ninety-one percent of the respondents indicated that doctrine was an important factor that attracted them to the church. Another major factor was preaching that “truly teaches the Bible.”⁴⁹ This is remarkable and shows that much of the modern church’s gimmickry is unnecessary and even harmful to the task. Rainer’s findings will be discussed later in this paper.⁵⁰

Acts

After Peter’s sermon at Pentecost, three thousand people became believers and were put under the watchcare of the apostles. Luke wrote in Acts that the members of this newborn Church “were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching (- The King James Version translates as “doctrine”) and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). It is noteworthy that “learning” is mentioned first by Luke. These new converts had just been through one of the greatest events in the history of religion: Pentecost. They easily could have devoted themselves to

⁴⁸ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 433.

⁴⁹ Thom S. Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 45, 48.

⁵⁰ See Chapter 3: Universalizing Doctrine.

discussing their experience. Instead, this new church was devoted to learning from the men who learned from Jesus. Undoubtedly, the apostles were fulfilling the command of Christ given in Matthew 28:19-20.

It is not hyperbolic to say that this proclivity towards study of the Scriptures is a defining mark of a truly Spirit-filled congregation. Boice says that “a “Spirit-filled church is always going to be a Bible-studying church. Those two things go together.”⁵¹ Today, we do not have any living apostles with us, but we have the words they penned. Today’s pastors fill the role of the apostles by teaching the members of their churches the same teaching the apostles taught. John MacArthur says that “the church cannot operate on truth it is not taught; believers cannot function on principles they have not learned.”⁵²

After making even more of their presence felt in Jerusalem, Luke writes that the apostles “were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them, being greatly disturbed because they were teaching () the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead” (Acts 4:2). The apostles were teaching doctrine, specifically the doctrine of the resurrection. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection (see Matthew 22:23) and ordered that the apostles be put into custody. However, their work was already finding root as the Bible declares that “many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand” (Acts 4:4).

In Acts 5, we read that the High Priest took the apostles captive and put them in jail. They were miraculously released from prison by an angel who told them to “speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life” (Acts 5:17-20). The apostles

⁵¹ James Montgomery Boice, *Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 57.

⁵² John MacArthur, *Acts 1-12* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1994), 83.

obeyed and “entered into the temple about daybreak and began to teach ()”

(Acts 5:21). The apostles understood the command to “speak to the people in the temple” (surely a large crowd of potential converts) as a command to “teach.” It seems more probable to today’s mind that the apostles would preach an evangelistic sermon. Instead, they taught. To be sure, evangelism was in the content of their teaching but teaching was the essential mode of the message.

The Jewish leaders once again arrested these men and told them, “We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching () in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching ()” (Acts 5:28). Peter responded by saying that they were bound to obey the Lord and not men.

After some wise counsel from one of their own, the Pharisees flogged the apostles and ordered them to cease speaking to the people. In an early example of civil disobedience, the apostles “went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching () and preaching (μ) Jesus as the Christ” (Acts 5:41-42). These men boldly went forth with their message which was doctrinal in its content. To the Jews who were still waiting on the Messiah to appear, the apostles presented from Scripture that Jesus was the Messiah. Doctrinal preaching was used as an evangelistic tool.

In Acts 11, Barnabas is in Tarsus looking for Saul, the newly converted former Pharisee. Luke writes that when he had found him, he “brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught () considerable numbers; and

the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch” (Acts 11:26). These two men knew just what believers in Antioch needed – the teaching of the Word.

In Acts 15, we discover that after the council in Jerusalem to discuss Paul’s allegedly libertine teachings, Paul and Barnabas “stayed in Antioch, teaching () and preaching (μ) with many others also, the word of the Lord” (Acts 15:35). The early church survived its biggest challenge to date and in doing so, firmly established the great doctrines of *sola gratia* and *sola fide* (salvation by grace alone through faith alone). As Paul and Barnabas continued to preach and teach, others who had been taught joined them in this endeavor. Biblical teaching begets biblical teaching. Preaching doctrinal sermons over time will lead to more biblically literate disciples, which will likely lead to those disciples multiplying.

Paul later traveled to Thessalonica:

... , where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And according to Paul’s custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned () with them from the Scriptures, explaining () and giving evidence (μ) that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and *saying*, “This Jesus whom I am proclaiming () to you is the Christ.” And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women. (Acts 17:2-4)

The Greek words for “reasoned” and “explaining” have an obvious correlation with the intellect, according to Kittel.⁵³ The term “explaining” comes from the Greek word meaning “to open.”⁵⁴ As Paul “opened” the Old Testament in these three sessions, he preached the doctrine of Christ’s suffering, death and resurrection, all of which fulfilled the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. This is reminiscent of the

⁵³ Kittel and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 155.

⁵⁴ Simon J. Kistemaker, *Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1990), 613.

method used by Jesus with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. We do not know the texts that Paul used, but we know the general content of the doctrinal sermons.

We also see the results of Paul's sermons – a few Jews and a large number of Gentiles were converted. The refusal of the Jews is not surprising and not unprecedented. Luke has already recorded several incidents of Jewish oppression. On his first missionary journey, he was opposed by the Jewish false-prophet Bar-Jesus (Acts 13:6ff). In Pisidian Antioch, the Jews jealously opposed him and began contradicting his statements (Acts 13:45). They later persecuted and banished Paul and Barnabas from the city (Acts 13:50). In Iconium, the Jews “stirred up the minds of the Gentiles and embittered them against the brethren” (Acts 14:2). After leaving Iconium for fear of his life, Paul nearly lost his life in Lystra (Acts 14:19). However, despite such opposition, Paul did not hesitate to preach the truth of the doctrine of Christ's passion.

Paul's courage was coupled with correct content.⁵⁵ To have the right message without courage renders the message useless. To have courage but the wrong message is to spread heresy and false teaching. In Paul, we see the marriage of courage and content that was able to change the world.

It takes courage to present the truths of Scripture because the gospel is a stumbling block. Paul later wrote that “the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18).

This verse explains why we can preach so boldly. If our message is biblical, God can use that message to save and edify. To those whose hearts remain closed, our message is foolishness. No amount of wisdom or winsomeness on our part will open that heart. Only God can replace a man's heart of stone with a heart of flesh. The Lord

⁵⁵ John MacArthur, *Acts 13-28* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1996), 119.

promises to “put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances” (Ezekiel 36:27). A proper understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in using the spoken words of preachers frees the preacher to teach even the most difficult of doctrines to his listeners.

Following the example of Paul, who courageously did not compromise his message of simple doctrinal truth, we learn a valuable lesson. Paul knew these people did not need to hear “Ten Steps to a Happy Life” or a sermon centered on the latest fad or gimmick or entertainment-centered allusion. They needed the words of life. He preached boldly, and God used his words to affect change in people’s lives.

As Paul walked through Athens, the center of Greek philosophy and home of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, the Bible says that “his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols” (Acts 17:16). As he surveyed this thoroughly pagan city, his heart was broken at the sight of a blind people worshipping idols. They needed to be healed of their spiritual blindness, so Paul began “reasoning () in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing *Gentiles*, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present” (Acts 17:16-17). Luke did not use the common words for preaching or teaching but instead captured the ministry of Paul with these Stoics and Epicureans with a word based on cognition. The Greek word used above does not describe a formal sermon but “a discussion, during which Paul repeatedly fielded questions from his hearers.”⁵⁶

John MacArthur states that “most people who reject the gospel have little knowledge of the Scriptures. . . . The primary duty in evangelism, then, must be to

⁵⁶ Ibid., 120.

demonstrate the truth of Christianity from the Scriptures.”⁵⁷ Christianity is a rational religion. The Christian faith does not require a blind leap of faith into the dark unknown. Instead, Christianity meets the standard of truth and can hold its own in the marketplace of ideas. Doctrinal preaching will accomplish evangelism far better than any worldly method “baptized” into service for the church.

After Paul’s stay in Athens, he traveled to Corinth (Acts 18:1). He stayed with Aquila and Priscilla, working to earn his own way as a tent-maker. However, he was still “in the synagogue every Sabbath . . . trying to persuade Jews and Greeks” (Acts 18:4). The people of Corinth resisted this message and, in anger, Paul threatened to leave. Later that night, however, the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision and told him to stay in Corinth. God promised physical protection and spiritual success by telling Paul the future: God had many people in that city yet to be saved (Acts 18:10). God could not have been talking about the people Paul had already spoken with because they were not many. Instead, God, who is able to see the future and determine it, was saying that by the preaching and teaching of the Word through Paul, He would bring many people to faith in Christ.⁵⁸ God had many people in that city, but He was going to use Paul as the tool to ensure His will was accomplished. This sort of “prediction” would encourage any preacher to remain and continue teaching, knowing that results are coming. No pastor knows how many people God has in his city. However, we know that God has chosen preachers as a means to meet His ends. With this good news, Luke writes that Paul “settled there a year and six months, teaching () the word of God among them” (Acts 18:11).

⁵⁷ Ibid., 122.

⁵⁸ James Montgomery Boice, *Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 309.

While Paul was traveling through Galatia, a Jew named Apollos came to Ephesus. He is described as an “eloquent man” from Alexandria who was “mighty in the Scriptures (Acts 18:24). Apollos had received some instruction in the “way of the Lord” and was “speaking () and teaching () accurately the things concerning Jesus” (Acts 18:25). However, his education was limited as he was only knowledgeable of the baptism of John. When he began speaking boldly in the synagogue, Paul’s friends Aquila and Priscilla “took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately” (Acts 18:26). This education reaped immediate dividends as Apollos traveled to Achaia and “powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ” (Acts 18:27-28).

Today’s pastors must also be willing to be taught and to continue their education. No pastor knows all he needs to know. No pastor is fully aware of every implication for each doctrine. No pastor can afford to rest on his laurels. Instead, we should all be like Apollos, who after receiving the teaching humbly, believed it and assimilated it into his current base of knowledge.⁵⁹

The Epistles

There are twenty-two letters in the New Testament, and Paul wrote at least thirteen of them. Several times in these letters, Paul emphasized the teaching aspect of the minister’s work. He was a teacher, trained by the great Jewish theologian Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), and he taught wherever he went and whomever he met. He selected a few men for more extensive training – Mark, Silas, Titus and Timothy.

⁵⁹Ibid., 317.

Paul taught in synagogues, by riversides, in prisons, in the marketplace, on hilltops, in schools, from a staircase, in the courtroom, on board a ship, and in people's houses. He taught Greeks, Jews, Romans, barbarians, educated philosophers, friends, political rulers, and those intent on killing him. Paul's life was centered on his teaching ministry, and he wanted his teaching ministry to expand.

Paul established churches as he traveled on his missionary journeys. After founding these churches, he trained people so that they could train and teach others. He wrote to his protégé Timothy, saying, "The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2). Paul saw the importance of establishing teachers in these Christian outposts. He knew that this new religion that had captured his life was based on the written word and that the written word would spread through the spoken word.

Paul also spent time writing theological treatises in the form of letters to some of the churches. In these letters, he responded doctrinally to certain situations those churches were facing. His writings cover a wide spectrum of topics and thought. He dealt with practical issues like the importance of unity and service in the church, the rejection of morality, the building of marriage and family relationships, and more. He also dealt with more theological issues such as pneumatology, soteriology, eschatology, and ecclesiology.

With the emphasis of the original authors of the epistles on didactic materials, it is not surprising that a number of elements of teaching doctrine come forth in those letters. In examining the words of the epistles, we find that the doctrinal preacher fulfills specific roles and performs specific functions.

The Role of the Doctrinal Preacher

The Doctrinal Preacher is a Shepherd

In the letters of the New Testament, we find several aspects of the teacher and the teaching role revealed. First, we note that the teacher is to be a shepherd. With regard to the leadership of the Church, Paul wrote that the role of the elder (or pastor or shepherd) is multi-faceted. Paul spoke to the elders in Ephesus and with false teachers clearly in view, instructed them to “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28). These leaders of the church must be vigilant because Paul knew that “after [his] departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them” (Acts 20:29-30). A major role of the shepherd in the ancient near east was to protect his defenseless flock from predators. In the same sense, the caretaker of God’s children must protect those often defenseless sheep from the attacks of false teachers. Jude, the brother of James, wrote just for this purpose. He told shepherds that he “felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ” (Jude 3-4). Jude was concerned about the effect these persons would have on the congregations, both in their actions and in their words.

Peter repeats the admonition, saying “shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily” (I Peter 5:1-4). In both

instances, the authors inform elders that they are responsible for the spiritual well-being of their congregations. Paul wrote to Titus and told him to install elders who are capable of “holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict” (Titus 1:9). Paul understood that the most dangerous battle a church will fight will be on the battlefield of the mind. It is for this reason that Paul tells Timothy that an elder must be “able to teach” (I Timothy 3:2). The elders are the generals who will lead the church onto that battlefield to fight those “who contradict.” The exhortation and refutation Paul demands will present itself most powerfully and regularly in the pulpit ministry of the church, where the elder engages in the teaching ministry.

The Doctrinal Preacher is a Slave

Jesus taught us that we are slaves either to sin or to righteousness. Paul continued this thought, saying “But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching () to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness” (Romans 6:17-18). Upon hearing the gospel of Christ, our hearts were changed by the Spirit of God. This change brought new allegiances, and we now stand under the banner of Christ and the teaching of Christ and His apostles.

Paul writes this in the context of instructing the Romans to not allow any false teachers in their fellowship and to be ever vigilant regarding this inappropriate teaching. He implies that the reason these false teachers are to be shunned is that they do not serve the body of Christ but instead serve their own bodies.⁶⁰ The root problem, according to

⁶⁰ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 803.

Schreiner, is idolatry. Any teaching that shifts the focus from God to anything other than God is idolatrous. Pastors today must be ever watchful that their preaching does not become man-centered. Richard Owen Roberts writes:

Man-centered preaching cannot result in radical conversion. Tragically, the preaching which characterizes much of today's pulpit activity wallows in the weakness of pandering to perceived needs - needs which are ordinarily dramatically different from true needs. For instance, many of those who are clamoring for acceptance really need repentance, and multitudes who come to church for comfort need to be severely discomfited and awakened out of their lethal slumbering. . . . Every preacher is in danger of telling his people what they want to hear. The motives for doing so are numerous, including larger paychecks, greater applause, and easier circumstances. If the preacher is called by men, he may sensibly give those who called him what they want, but what if the preacher is called by God? How can he dare speak less than all the truth of God?⁶¹

Instead, it is incumbent upon the preacher to seek to ever lift up God in all that takes place in the worship service, especially in the preaching and teaching of the Word of God.

The Doctrinal Preacher is a Servant

Shortly after giving that solemn charge to Timothy, Paul continues to impress upon the pastor his responsibilities. Paul tells Timothy that by “pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine () which you have been following” (I Timothy 4:6). Paul reminds Timothy that his sustenance as a minister of the Gospel is on the Word of God and the sound doctrine he had been taught. Earlier, Paul had written that elders were to pass on this same teaching so that others could teach as well.

⁶¹ Richard Owen Roberts, “Preaching that Hinders,” *Grace Online Library*, 1998, n.d., <http://www.graceonlinelibrary.org/etc/prINTER-friendly.asp?ID=341>, (accessed April 14, 2006).

In doing so, Paul instructs Timothy that he is a servant. To be a servant, Timothy must continue to point out “these things.” What things? In the previous five verses, Paul was warning Timothy of the inevitable decline in doctrinal precision in the church. He wrote that “the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines () of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron” (1 Timothy 4:1-4). Men will enter the church and teach “doctrines of demons” that must be countered with the truth of the Word of God.

It is in countering these false teachings that Timothy would be considered a “good servant of Christ Jesus.” To defeat the influence of false teaching, the pastor must not only teach the truth but exhibit the truth in his life. Preachers must show their people that the truth of Scripture “works” in real life by being a servant of Christ in their teaching and preaching ministry. There is no higher goal for any preacher or teacher than to receive the appellation of “good servant” at the end of his ministry.

The Doctrinal Preacher is a Sentry

The pastor is called a shepherd and an overseer, among other ecclesiastical titles. A military denotation is also used by Paul. In writing to the Roman believers, he urges the brethren to “keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching () which you learned, and turn away from them. For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting” (Romans 16:16-17).

Robert Mounce suggests that it seems there are always those in a group who are dissatisfied and who scheme the downfall of the group.⁶² In the church, this planned downfall is typically orchestrated through teaching false doctrine which inevitably brings non-Christlike behavior. All teaching must align theologically with the teaching already received or that “which you learned.” Paul tells the Christians in Rome to be ever vigilant to watch for such divisive men in their midst. Today’s pastor must also stand guard for the purity of the pulpit and heed the warnings of Paul to “turn away from them.”

The Doctrinal Preacher is a Steward

In writing to Titus, Paul told him that an overseer must be above reproach as “God’s steward” (Titus 1:7). A steward is one who may be “the head of a particular branch of a great house . . . or estate manager or accountant as well as a housekeeper.”⁶³ In a wider sense, a steward is one who administers a public office. The apostles and other teachers were administrators (or ministers) of the gospel.

As an overseer in today’s church, the pastor must meet several qualifications. One is to be able to “[hold] fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching (), so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine () and to refute those who contradict” (Titus 1:9). The other qualifications have to do with character – what kind of person an elder is *to be*. Now, in verse nine, we see what an elder is *to do*. Every elder who is truly called of God to preach will have this ability to teach. The effectiveness of that teaching ministry will vary from pastor to pastor but preaching and teaching are the *sine qua non* of pastoral ministry.⁶⁴

⁶² Robert H. Mounce, *Romans* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1995), 278.

⁶³ Kittel and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 678.

⁶⁴ John MacArthur, *Titus* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1996), 44.

Thusly, the pastor is gifted and commanded to use those gifts in order to “exhort in sound doctrine” and “refute those who contradict.” He is to strengthen God’s people in their knowledge of the Scriptures and in their obedience to them. The pastor is also to speak against false teachers and those who oppose the truth. There is to be no mercy given to such evil men. As Paul told Titus in verses 10-11, “there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain.”

The Function of Doctrinal Preaching

Doctrinal Preaching is Scripture-Based

Paul wrote that “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16). The scope of this thesis does not allow for treatment of the authority of Scripture. However, we can see from this passage that the inspired Scriptures are beneficial to its readers and hearers for “teaching.” MacArthur says “this word does not refer to the process or method of teaching but to its content.”⁶⁵ If we teach solely from tradition-laden denominationalism, then that is all our people will have as ammunition when false teachers confront them. We can improve here. Today’s pastor must put his full confidence in the teaching of God’s Word, allowing its contents to be used by God to do God’s work in people’s lives.

⁶⁵ John MacArthur, *2 Timothy* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1995), 154.

Doctrinal Preaching is Serious

James, the half-brother of Jesus, expressed his concern for those thinking of becoming teachers of doctrine. He said, “Let not many of you become teachers (), my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment” (James 3:1). Even with the great need for teachers in the ancient world (and our modern one), James urged caution on the part of all those considering the ministry.

Ralph Martin suggests that if any person is considering entering the ministry, “it is best that such a notion be seriously considered.”⁶⁶ He says James’ words may even be a command for some to step down from serving as teachers. Regardless of the motive, James is intent on revealing the serious nature of the teaching ministry. James even includes himself in the warning, using “we.” He understands that as with every teacher of Scripture, he will incur a stricter judgment. To be called and equipped allows one to withstand the judgment if their teaching is true. James’ point seems to be that no believer should enter into the teaching ministry without fully understanding the serious nature of the task. Speaking as an ambassador for God carries much weight.

The prophet Ezekiel underscores this thought:

Son of man, I have appointed you a watchman to the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from My mouth, warn them from Me. When I say to the wicked, ‘You will surely die,’ and you do not warn him or speak out to warn the wicked from his wicked way that he may live, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. Yet if you have warned the wicked and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered yourself. (Ezekiel 3:17-19)

The writer of Hebrews tells us that Christians are to submit to their leaders who “keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account” (Hebrews 13:17). It appears Paul was obedient in this regard, as he said “I testify to you this

⁶⁶ Ralph Martin, *James* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1988), 107.

day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God” (Acts 20:26-27). May each pastor be able to truthfully make that same statement at the end of his ministry.

Doctrinal Preaching is Spiritual

We know that teaching is a spiritual gift. For that reason, teaching the doctrines of God is a spiritual exercise. Some, however, try to teach using only their natural intellect and reasoning abilities. While this exercise may be successful in the secular market, it is a recipe for disaster in the church. John wrote to one tempted to rely on his own abilities, saying, “These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you. As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him. Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming” (1 John 2:26-28). John reminded this person, and today’s preacher, that he is to rely on the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit to be effective in the spiritual realm. This reliance comes from abiding in Christ.

Doctrinal Preaching is Solemn

Paul knew well the task that lies ahead for young pastors like Timothy. Younger pastors often enter the ministry with a gallon of zeal and an ounce of discernment and wisdom. It is easy for the young pastor, especially in today’s church culture, to dive headlong into the next fad or gimmick that presents itself as a guarantee of church growth and ministerial success. Paul had other ideas. Paul wrote to young Timothy, urging him

with a voice of solemnity to focus on one thing: preaching. This preaching had a teaching element to it, as seen in Paul's well-known pastoral charge:

I solemnly charge *you* in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach () the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine (); but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers () in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. (2 Timothy 4:1-4)

The somber mood of Paul's charge emanates from the fact that it is tied directly to the majesty of the God who calls and commissions people to preach for Him.⁶⁷ Those whom God calls to preach have the weightiest of all responsibilities. It is the Lord to whom preachers of the gospel must give an account. Pastors will not answer for how well they kept their audience's attention or how well-entertained their audiences were or how many belly-laughs they induced. Instead, preachers will stand before the Lord and be judged for their willingness and faithfulness in preaching the Word and sound doctrine.

We must notice the abrupt change in verse five where Paul writes, "But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry." We see here a contradiction between the "preachers" who speak only to tickle ears and Paul's determination that Timothy be a preacher who will be able to stand before the Lord after a life of sober ministry.

⁶⁷ John MacArthur, *2 Timothy* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1995), 168.

Doctrinal Preaching is Sincere

The goal of teaching doctrine is not the dissemination of knowledge. The goal is not “head knowledge.” In the opening paragraph of this initial letter to the young shepherd, Paul urged Timothy to “remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines” (1 Timothy 1:3). In doing so, Timothy was to ignore “myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith” (1 Timothy 1:4). Obedience to this command is an important element, but it is not the end goal.

Instead, Paul tells Timothy that “the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1 Timothy 1:5). Paul did not want Timothy to get caught up in the philosophical arguments of these false teachers of strange doctrines. Paul said these men had actually “strayed” from teaching out of love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith (1 Timothy 1:6).

Love for our listeners is to be our goal. We teach because we love them, not to show our listeners how much we know. We do not teach to impress anyone, but because God has called us to love the men and women around us and a sure sign of love is to warn, protect, and lead them into the truth of the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Doctrinal Preaching must be Sustained

Paul wrote to Timothy and instructed him to “remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct () certain men not to teach strange doctrines ()” (1 Timothy 1:3). The word for “instruct” is to “command.” Paul demanded Timothy do this, knowing the damage that can be done by false teachings. The word for “teach strange doctrines” is formed by a compound word from *heteros* (“of a

different kind”) and *didaskalein* (“to teach”).⁶⁸ Whatever the false teachers were teaching, it was different from the teachings of Paul, and therefore, it was in opposition to the truth.

From Paul’s statements, we can infer that Timothy was thinking of leaving this post. Timothy was given a job to do, and he was to remain in that task until the work was complete. Only God knows the length of a ministry’s effectiveness.

Consequently, the Bible admonishes teachers of doctrine that the act of teaching is not something one does from “time to time.” A preacher cannot afford to neglect this vital aspect of preaching. Instead, shepherds are urged to maintain a steady regimen of teaching. Paul encouraged Timothy to “give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching ()” (1 Timothy 4:13). It appears that these three responsibilities were paramount in Paul’s mind. Yet, these three are not all-inclusive. The Word is the agent of change in God’s redemptive plan. Exhortation includes warning, encouragement, and advice. Teaching is included in these important things because, as William Hendrickson writes, “It *does* make a difference *what* one believes! The attitude of heart is not everything. There are certain facts with respect to doctrine and morals which must be taught and which one must accept and embrace, so that one’s life is founded upon them.”⁶⁹

Paul drives the point home two verses later, telling Timothy to “take pains with these things” and to “be absorbed in them” (1 Timothy 4:15). If a preacher will do just that, the progress that is made in ministry will be seen by all.

⁶⁸ Kittel and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 161-166.

⁶⁹ William Hendriksen, *Thessalonians, Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1992), 158 (emphasis in original).

Paul closes this portion of advice to Timothy by telling him why it is so important to persevere in the teaching ministry of the pulpit. Paul writes, “Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching (); persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you” (1 Timothy 4:16).

The writer of Hebrews also expounds on the idea that the teaching ministry of the church must be sustained. After writing that Christ is the High Priest, and upon recognizing that this is a difficult teaching to understand, the author says that, nonetheless, it is time to leave the “elementary teaching () about the Christ” (Hebrews 6:1). The New International Version translates that same Greek word as the plural “teachings,” and the English Standard Version uses the word “doctrine.”

After leaving these elementary words, ministers are to “press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of instruction () about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. And this we will do, if God permits” (Hebrews 6:1-3). The believer is to persevere in the teaching he has received. Paul, writing his second letter to the Thessalonians, equates our election by God unto salvation as the reason to remain strong in our instruction from our teaching pastors. He writes that “God has chosen [us] from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. It was for this He called [us] through our gospel, that [we] may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught (), whether by word of mouth or by letter from us” (2 Thessalonians 2:13-15).

Doctrinal Preaching can Split

It has often been said that “love unites but doctrine divides.” You can counter this truth by stating that “Truth sets free.” Paul said in Romans that “I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people” (Romans 16:17-18). J. Gresham Machen said, “Again, men tell us that our preaching should be positive and not negative, that we can preach the truth without attacking error. But if we follow that advice we shall have to close our Bible and desert its teachings. The New Testament is a polemic book almost from beginning to end. . . . It is when men have felt compelled to take a stand against error that they have risen to the really great heights in the celebration of the truth.”⁷⁰ Pastors who avoid controversy will fail to preach the whole counsel of God. Every pastor will eventually have to take a stand on a controversial issue. The pastor who refuses to do so will fail his congregation and will be forced to ponder his true motivation. As Paul said, “If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ” (Gal 1:10).

There is the possibility of division in the teaching of the truth of the Word of God. However, division is not always a bad thing. Doctrine divides because it is definitive. What we believe determines who we are. This is the sole reason we have divided into denominations such as Baptists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Methodists and Catholics. In giving instructions regarding elders and those who minister, Paul tells Timothy to “teach () and preach () these principles” (1 Timothy 6:2b). He continues, “if

⁷⁰ J. Gresham Machen, “What Is Christianity?” in Ernest Pickering, *Biblical Separation: The Struggle for a Pure Church*, (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Press, 2001), 97.

anyone advocates a different doctrine () and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine () conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing” (1 Timothy 6:4). Furthermore, Paul says such an individual “has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain” (1 Timothy 6:4-5).

In John’s very short second letter, he warns his readers that “many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh” (2 John 7). The teachers of this type of false doctrine are called “deceivers” and “antichrists.” John responds to these individuals by urging his readers to be on guard for themselves so that they do not lose what they have already gained in his ministry. The apostle helps the readers detect false teachers, defining them as ones who do not “abide in the teaching () of Christ” (2 John 9). These do not have God.

John warns them that “if anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching (), do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds” (2 John 10-11). The definition of an “antichrist” is one who teaches false doctrine. To even allow such a teacher into one’s house is to participate in his evil. Instead, John encourages his readers to listen to men who teach the truth.

Apocalyptic

In the Revelation of Christ given to John, the role of teaching appears three times. Each appearance is in a negative connotation. In the second chapter, John directs a message to the angel of the church in Pergamum. This church is accused of having some in its presence who “hold to the teaching () of Balaam” and some who “hold to the teaching () of the Nicolaitans” (Revelation 2:14, 15).

The next church John writes to is in Thyatira. The rebuke is strong: “I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches () and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols” (Revelation 2:20). There were some, however, who did not fall prey to this false teaching. To them, Jesus said, “the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching (), who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them—I place no other burden on you. Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come” (Revelation 2:24-25). When false teaching is present, the shepherd is to teach the truth and guide his congregation to hold fast to the truth.

Throughout Scripture, God speaks against false teaching and any semblance of adherence to false teaching. Yet, teachers continue to rise up from inside and outside the Church to present teachings that are not in line with the received teaching of the true Church. An important aspect of the minister in every era of redemptive history has been to teach the truth and, at the same time, to refute erroneous teaching. In the preaching ministry of the elder/pastor/shepherd/overseer/bishop, that individual must be sure that there is a teaching aspect to his work. As we have seen, the Bible not only expects it. The Bible demands it.

Chapter 3 – Literature Review of Doctrinal Preaching

Introduction to Doctrinal Preaching

The Bible is a theological book containing doctrine. It may be more than this, but it is not less. Therefore, the pastor who desires to preach expository sermons will have to deal with doctrinal issues. The ability to promote the truth or to defend from error will often be the hallmark of a pastor's legacy at a particular parish. It is more likely that today's pastor is known more for success or the lack thereof in growth, publishing or denominational offices held. However, Al Mohler, President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville declares that "every pastor is called to be a theologian." He goes on to say that "As a theologian, the pastor must be known for what he teaches, as well as for what he knows, affirms, and believes."⁷¹ Such was the case with two contemporaneous Puritan pastors.

Doctrine and Jonathan Edwards

Jonathan Edwards is often referred to as America's greatest theologian. Few argue with that assessment. However, his theological convictions were formed and tested in the crucible of the pastorate of a local church in Northampton, Massachusetts. His church there witnessed its share of controversy over doctrinal issues.

Solomon Stoddard, the pastor in Northampton and Jonathan Edwards' grandfather, practiced "open communion," meaning that baptized adults could partake of communion "even without evidence of being converted."⁷² Stoddard adopted this view due to his overriding concern of converting people through any God-given means

⁷¹ Albert Mohler, "The Pastor as Theologian, Part Three," www.albertmohler.com, April 21, 2006, n.d., http://albertmohler.com/commentary_read.php?cdate=2006-04-21, (accessed May 1, 2006).

⁷² George Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 122.

possible. He believed that “opening the Lord’s Supper was a tangible way to bring people into the presence of Christ’s sacrifice and a sensibility of the depths of their wickedness for which Christ had died.”⁷³ Stoddard adopted the Old Testament model of a national Israel that said “anyone who was upright and would affirm Christian principles should be a full member of the church. Conversion could come later. That was what the church ordinances, the Lord’s Supper, as well as Gospel preaching, were designed to promote.”⁷⁴ This practice ensured that almost every person in the community was a baptized member of the church.

While serving alongside Stoddard, Edwards was troubled by this practice. However, he was not entirely convinced at that time that his arguments against the position carried sufficient weight. He decided to live with the practice when he could find no way of identifying with certainty the saints of God.⁷⁵ Years later, he confessed that he was never at ease with Stoddard’s position. This compromise would ultimately lead to his greatest battle and worst defeat.

Solomon Stoddard died on February 11, 1729, after fifty-years as pastor of the Congregational Church in Northampton. Edwards became the pastor of the growing church at the age of 26 and eventually began instituting changes based on his understanding of doctrine which in turn affected the polity of the church.

The changes after nearly two decades of the *status quo* raised a firestorm of controversy. Many in the congregation reasoned that it was only the death of Edwards’

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 351.

⁷⁵ See especially *Miscellanies*, nos. 317, 325, 335, 338, and 345 (all written probably in late 1727-28), in Perry Miller, John E. Smith, Harry S. Stout, gen. ed., *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 13.

uncle that cleared the way for Edwards' reversals of Solomon Stoddard's practices concerning church membership and the administration of the sacraments.

First, Edwards attempted to change Stoddard's long-held practice of bringing church disciplinary cases before the entire gathered congregation. Edwards contended that no healing could take place in such an atmosphere and preached a four-part doctrinal sermon in June 1748 to argue that "'Tis the mind of God that not a mixed multitude but only select persons of distinguishing ability and integrity are fit for the business of judging causes."⁷⁶ According to Marsden, Edwards' main points of dissension were backed by Scripture though he did not fail to use human nature, civil government, and military practice to buttress his position.

Then, Edwards aimed his sights at the main Stoddardean position with which he had come to disagree. In contrast to his grandfather, Edwards insisted on a New Testament model of the church, which Edwards took to mean that the only true members of the church were "those whose hearts were changed by regeneration."⁷⁷ Edwards acknowledged that only God was able to infallibly judge the heart, but he held fast to his belief that full members should "at the least be able to produce the outward signs of regeneration, including a heartfelt profession."⁷⁸ This change in belief was recorded in Edwards' 1749 treatise, *An Humble Inquiry into the Rules of the Word of God, Concerning the Qualifications Requisite to a Complete Standing and Full Communion in the Visible Christian Church*.

⁷⁶ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 345-6

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 351.

⁷⁸ Jonathan Edwards, *An Humble Inquiry into the Rules of the Word of God, Concerning the Qualifications Requisite to a Complete Standing and Full Communion in the Visible Christian Church*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edward*, 12:266-83, quoted in Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 351-52.

Edwards explained his views to the committee of the church and asked to be allowed to preach on the subject. This time, the committee refused. Edwards proceeded to write his views in a pamphlet, but the committee would not be moved from their tradition.

As this battle continued, Edwards soon trained his sights on the matter of baptism. He refused to allow the hypocrisy of pagan parents bringing their children to the church to be baptized. The subsequent repudiation of the “halfway covenant,” which provided a way for the children of baptized non-communicants to be baptized, was also outlawed. Edwards began requiring that parents seeking baptism for the children be full-fledged members themselves. This position only made the controversy burn brighter and hotter.

The fact that Edwards was willing to “sail the foundering ship of his pastorate in the teeth of the storm, knowing full well that he and his family were likely to go down, tells us much about his character.”⁷⁹ Once he arrived at a theological position, he was unwilling to compromise. To that end, he steadfastly and boldly preached publicly the convictions he held so strongly. He believed fully what he thought the Scriptures to reveal and was convinced that the life and death of eternal souls hung in the balance. To Edwards, that fact was worth the risk of his pastorate and his family’s material well-being. Right doctrine was everything, and it was worth preaching and defending. In his own mind, Edwards’ determination to remain true to the doctrines of the Bible forced him to the resignation that he was “born to be a man of strife.”⁸⁰

Edwards was dismissed from the pastorate in Northampton on June 22, 1750, just a little over two years from the attempted changes in practice.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 349.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

Doctrine and John Newton

As forceful and determined as Jonathan Edwards was at times, John Newton was meek, gentle and tender. John Piper writes that “the most illuminating way I know to illustrate Newton’s deeply rooted habitual tenderness is in the way he handled doctrinal and moral truth that he cherished deeply.”⁸¹ In doctrinal matters, Newton moved slowly, thinking that he had “been thirty years forming my own views . . .; how unreasonable within me to expect all this should take place in another person; and that, in the course of a year or two.”⁸²

Newton wanted to spread the truth, but he believed that controversy over doctrine caused more detriment than benefit. He once wrote that “I see the unprofitableness of controversy in the case of Job and his friends: for, if God had not interposed, had they lived to this day they would have continued the dispute.”⁸³ Newton worked diligently to avoid controversy by attempting to replace argumentation with a positive presentation of truth: “My principle method of defeating heresy is by establishing truth. One proposes to fill a bushel with tares: now, if I can fill it first with wheat, I shall defy his attempts.”⁸⁴

Newton also realized the importance of not interjecting his own opinions into the discussion, preferring to be patient and unobtrusive. The great Puritan wrote that “being deeply convinced that no one can profitably understand the great truths and doctrines of the gospel any farther than he is taught by God, I have not a wish to obtrude my own

⁸¹ John Piper, *The Roots of Endurance: Invincible Perseverance in the Lives of John Newton, Charles Simeon and William Wilberforce* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002), 60.

⁸² Richard Cecil, “Memoirs of the Rev. John Newton,” in *The Works of the Rev. John Newton*, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1985), 101, quoted in Piper, *Roots of Endurance*, 60-1.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 100.

tenets upon others, in a way of controversy; yet I do not think myself bound to conceal them.”⁸⁵

In the end, Newton was more concerned with influencing people with the truth for their own good than he was for winning any theological debate. Even regarding his Calvinism, which he viewed as essential to his peace, saying that he could not live comfortably a day or an hour without them, he was gentle.⁸⁶ He likened his approach to disseminating doctrine in this manner, saying, “I am more of a Calvinist than anything else; but I use my Calvinism in my writings and my preaching as I use this sugar – taking a lump and putting it into his tea-cup and stirring it, adding, ‘I do not give it alone, and whole; but mixed and diluted.’”⁸⁷ His doctrine influenced everything he wrote and preached, but he delved it out in right proportions.

However, Newton’s unwillingness to deal harshly with false teaching led to some dismal results. William Plummer wrote that “the pious and amiable John Newton made it a rule to never attack error, nor warn his people against it. . . . The effect of Mr. Newton’s practice was unhappy. He was hardly dead till many of his people went far astray. . . . The more subtle, bitter, and numerous the foes of the truth are the more fearless and decided should its friends be. The life of truth is more important than the life of any man or any theories.”⁸⁸

⁸⁵ *The Works of the Rev. John Newton*, Vol. 3 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), 303, quoted in Piper, *Roots of Endurance*, 61.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ D. Bruce Hindmarsh, “‘I Am a Sort of Middle Man’: The Politically Correct Evangelicalism of John Newton,” in *Amazing Grace: Evangelicalism in Australia, Britain, Canada and the United States*, eds. George Rawlyk and Mark Noll (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1993), 32, quoted in *Ibid.*, 64.

⁸⁸ Williams S. Plummer, *The Christian, to which is added, False Doctrines and False Teachers: How to Know Them and How to Treat Them* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1997), 22, quoted in Piper, *Roots of Endurance*, 65.

Doctrine and Today's Preacher

Which historical figure took the right approach in presenting the doctrines he felt defined his pastorate? Should today's pastor fight like Edwards, using all the tools of his intelligence to preach polemically? To do so is to risk great controversy and personal upheaval. Should today's pastor serve like Newton, preaching almost entirely irenic presentations of the truth? To do so is to risk that the listeners are able to assimilate this knowledge and use it appropriately during times of doctrinal crisis in the pastor's absence. Perhaps the answer is a middle position between these two Puritan divines.

To use the approach of Edwards is to invite controversy. However, the truth must be established and must be preached without compromise or reservation. To use the approach of Newton is to risk letting false doctrine keep breathing.

In his book on Newton, John Piper excuses Newton by saying that "most pastors and laypeople cannot devote much of their time to blowing the trumpet for rigorous intellectual theology. They should see its usefulness and necessity and encourage its proper place. But they cannot be faulted that they mainly have flocks to love and hearts to change. Defending the truth is a crucial part of that, but it is not the main part. *Holding* the truth and *permeating* all our ministry with the greatness and sweetness of truth for the transformation of our people's lives is the main part of our ministry."⁸⁹

Al Mohler begs to differ with Piper. Mohler writes daily on his online commentary, and on April 17, 2006, he wrote, "Every pastor is called to be a theologian. This may come as a surprise to some pastors, who see theology as an academic discipline taken during seminary rather than as an ongoing and central part of the pastoral calling. Nevertheless, the health of the church depends upon its pastors functioning as faithful

⁸⁹ Piper, *Roots of Endurance*, 67 (italics in original).

theologians – teaching, preaching, defending, and applying the great doctrines of the faith.”⁹⁰

This should be evident from Scripture. In Paul’s letter to Timothy, the apostle tells the young pastor to preach in order to “reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction” (2 Timothy 4:2). Paul tells him this for this simple reason: “the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths” (2 Timothy 4:3-4). It seems that Paul understood that the truths of the Scriptures were difficult for most to digest, but that the true preacher of the Word must stand boldly and constantly against the tide of casual Christianity and its ticklish doctrines.

The pastor has the job of defending the faith handed down by faithful men through the centuries. He must discern the false teaching that is sure to appear in the lives of his listeners. He must then correct those errors before they take root and do damage to the Body. All of this is an inherently theological task, and it will take time, study, and great effort. Paul says as much to another pastor, Titus, when he wrote that the pastor’s job is to hold fast “the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able to both exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict” (Titus 1:9). In this single sentence, Paul “simultaneously affirms the apologetical and polemical facets for the pastor-theologian’s calling.”⁹¹

From these passages, it appears that Mohler is correct – the pastor must be a theologian in the daily working out of his calling. The modern evangelical model often

⁹⁰ Albert Mohler, “The Pastor as Theologian, Part One,” *www.albertmohler.com*, April 17, 2006, n.d., http://albertmohler.com/commentary_read.php?cdate=2006-04-17, (accessed May 1, 2006).

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, paragraph 11.

calls for the pastor to be a manager of a religious business or the counselor of persons seeking therapy or the simple communicator of moralized platitudes. With such a mindset, theology and doctrine are often seen essentially sources for conflict and trouble rather than foundations and solutions for the real problems that exist.

Grenz and Olson state that the person (or pastor) who desires to be a theologian must be “more interested in knowing God than in amassing ideas about God.”⁹² A heart for God is crucial. Second, the pastor must be forever unsatisfied with his level of knowledge. The pastor must be always learning, always reading, always thinking. Third, becoming a theological or doctrinal preacher means that the pastor will be willing to work. Theology is not simple, and theologizing is not easy.

In this chapter, I will examine literature on the topic of doctrinal preaching. In doing so, I will follow closely the outline of Millard Erickson and James Heflin in their book, *Old Wine and New Wineskins*.

The Value of Doctrinal Preaching

Mohler writes that “there is no dimension of the pastor’s calling that is *not* deeply, inherently, and inescapably theological.”⁹³ Indeed, the pastor must understand that every problem that arises in counseling will be dealt with on a theological level. Every question or problem in ministry is dealt with from a theological foundation. Every program that is to be considered must run through the pastor’s theological grid to discern its worth and effectiveness. Every witnessing event is an exercise in proclaiming the theology of God’s redemptive plan.

⁹² Grenz and Olson, *Who Needs Theology?*, 135.

⁹³ Ibid. (*italics in original*).

Beyond this, the pastor's primary task of preaching the Scriptures is entirely theological. To think or practice otherwise is to depart from an historical understanding of preaching. Therefore, doctrinal preaching is of great value to the pastor and the body of Christ assembled in local churches around the world.

Doctrinal Preaching is Important

There are many things that often take priority in the mind of the pastor. Pastors are called to attend meetings and to make visits in hospitals and homes. Some pastors serve the community, and others serve their denomination. The difficult work of studying doctrine and preparing to teach doctrine easily slides to the bottom of the list. Erickson says that "this topic must be engaged first, for if doctrine is not really important to Christianity and to the life of the church, then it really does not matter how we communicate it."⁹⁴ Therefore, doctrine is vital and even precedes the very act of preaching.

Doctrine defines the Christian religion, which began and continues to exist because of specific beliefs regarding Jesus Christ and the words of Bible. Doctrine is prominent throughout Scripture. For example, in the first few chapters of Genesis, we discover doctrines on creation, the existence of God, the Trinity (implied in the use of singular and plural names), humanity, sin, incarnation, atonement, and even salvation. Throughout the Old Testament, prophets spoke for God, revealing God's will for His people and giving us doctrines of God's providence and messianic and eschatological prophecies. The gospels are replete with the teachings of Jesus Christ and the transforming power of His words. The epistles are sometimes doctrinal treatises written

⁹⁴ Erickson and Heflin, *Old Wine in New Wineskins*, 20.

by apostles to churches just like the ones we have today. The Scriptures contain doctrines and the authors value the doctrines they present in their writings.

We also know that the deliverance of proper doctrine is important in the history of the Christian faith. Soon after Christ ascended, false teachers appeared to distort the pristine faith once delivered to the saints. Heresies sprang forth that threatened the church, and men of God answered with doctrinal precision. The early church understood the theological concepts of the Trinity and the nature of Christ. However, these doctrines were never codified until the presence of heretical ideas loomed large. Therefore, it can be said that heresy is, in some sense, the “mother of orthodoxy.” The answers to the false teachings came in the form of creeds such as the Apostle’s Creed, the Nicene Creed (A.D. 325 and 381) and the Chalcedonian Creed (A.D. 451), among others. These creeds were an attempt to put forth the correct understanding of the Church on important doctrinal matters.

The issues these church councils addressed were paramount and imminently practical. For instance, the major issues of the early councils dealt with the nature of Christ and the union of His divinity with His humanity. Some argued that Christ was only similar (*homoiousios*) in nature to God the Father. Others argued that Christ was the same (*homoousios*) as God the Father. The semantic difference between the two positions is a single letter, but the matter is not trivial in the least. One position, the latter, puts forth a Savior who is truly able to save completely. The former posits a Savior who cannot save.

The individuals who gathered in these councils were pastors of local congregations across the land. It is thought that over three hundred clergy gathered for the first council at Nicaea. Only two bishops sided with the Arian (*homoiousios*) teaching

and were excommunicated. The remaining orthodox bishops returned to their parishes to teach their congregants the doctrine properly discerned.

As in the early church, doctrinal preaching is important today because the heresies of history keep appearing in modern times. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and the Jehovah's Witnesses are simply modern-day Arians. As sincere individuals from these cults go door-to-door in our communities, church members will come in contact with them. Doctrinal preaching will prepare them to understand the biblical position of the nature of Christ. Of course, this is just one such doctrine, but it serves to reveal the importance of preaching and teaching doctrine in the church today.

As important as doctrinal preaching is, it is seldom heard. Thomas Schreiner, the James Buchanan Harrison Professor of New Testament and the Associate Dean for Scripture and Interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, wrote in the school's theological journal that "conservative churches almost always preach on the horizontal level. The congregation is bombarded with sermons about marriage, raising children, success in business, overcoming depression, conquering fears and so on and so forth. . . . Our pastors turn to moralists rather like Dear Abby who give advice on how to live a happy life week after week."⁹⁵ He goes on to explain that most in the congregation do not realize they are being fed watered-down messages because the core meaning of the sermons they hear sound Scriptural. Furthermore, the plea to live moral lives also sounds thoroughly Scriptural. The result, according to Schreiner, is that after "we have fed them a steady diet of moralistic preaching, . . . they

⁹⁵ Thomas R. Schreiner, "Preaching and Biblical Theology," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 10:2 (Summer 2006), 20.

are taught to be kind, forgiving, loving, good husbands and wives (all good things of course!), but the theological foundation for such is completely neglected.”⁹⁶

In line with Paul’s words in 2 Timothy 4:3-4 about teaching to tickling ears, Schreiner says that this practice invites heresy in the front door of the church. He explains this provocative statement, writing that the original moralizing pastor in the illustration above is not heretical but fully orthodox. However, he has “*assumed* theology in all his preaching.”⁹⁷ The problem comes later:

In the next generation or in two or three generations the congregation may inadvertently and unknowingly call a more liberal pastor. He too preaches that people should be good, kind, and loving. He too emphasizes that we should have good marriages and dynamic relationships. The people in the pew may not even discern the difference. The theology seems to be just like the theology of the conservative pastor who preceded him. And in a sense, it is, for the conservative pastor never proclaimed or preached his theology. The conservative pastor believed in the inerrancy of scripture but not its sufficiency, for he did not proclaim all that the scriptures teach to his congregation.⁹⁸

Doctrinal Preaching is Relational

Millard Erickson writes that doctrine is “essential to the relationship with God.”⁹⁹

The writer of Hebrews says that “without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6). As Erickson explains, the faith is not merely a correct understanding of biblical revelation. James writes that the demons also believe that God is One but that understanding does not save them. Faith, beyond cognition, is also a trust or commitment to something or someone.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 21.

⁹⁷ Ibid. (emphasis in original).

⁹⁸ Ibid., 22.

⁹⁹ Erickson and Heflin, *Old Wine in New Wineskins*, 23.

Some have twisted this to say that it does not matter what a person believes about Jesus as long as that belief is sincere and the person is fully committed to those beliefs. However, as has been said often, it is possible to be sincerely wrong. The level of sincerity in your beliefs about Jesus is irrelevant if you believe in the wrong Jesus. Again, we see in the teachings of the Mormons that they believe in Jesus, but the Jesus they have put their faith in is not the Jesus of the Bible. For that reason, Mormons who hold to the actual teachings of the Mormon church have no relationship with Christ and, therefore, they are not saved. It takes a correct understanding of the doctrines of Scripture to establish a proper relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Other aspects of our relationship with God and with people are based on doctrine. Paul uses the incarnation of Christ to teach us to care more for the needs of others than for our own needs (Philippians 2:1-11). In Ephesians, Paul points to the doctrine of salvation by grace alone as the impetus to good works by the Christian (Ephesians 2:-8-9). Peter tells us to live holy lives because we have been bought with a price – the blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:14-19). John saw the essentiality of believing correctly when he wrote “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting” (2 John 10).

As should be obvious, the preaching of these doctrines leads to a right relationship with God and those around us. In this sense, doctrinal preaching is imminently vital to our relationships.

Doctrinal Preaching is Relevant

In the early part of the twentieth century, no preacher was more famous than Harry Emerson Fosdick. From the pulpit at Riverside Church in New York, we know that

“Sunday by Sunday, throngs crowded into the church, not only from every section of Metropolitan New York but from every corner of the nation and distant parts of the world, overflowing its cathedral-like sanctuary into its chapel and auditorium, filling every room into which the service could be amplified.”¹⁰⁰ It was not uncommon for people to line up hours ahead of the service just to get a seat in the sanctuary to hear this famous orator.

In a famous essay written in 1928 for *Harper's Magazine*, Fosdick asked the question, “What is the Matter with Preaching?” In this article, Fosdick wrote:

Every sermon should have for its main business the solving of some problem – a vital, important problem, puzzling minds, burdening consciences, distracting lives – and any sermon which thus does tackle a real problem, throw even a little light on it, and help some individuals practically to find their way through it cannot be altogether uninteresting.¹⁰¹

From this presupposition, Fosdick went on to explain that the “habitual indulgence” of expository preaching is “more surely predestined to dullness and futility.” Fosdick detested expository preaching. He wrote that “preachers who pick out texts from the Bible and then proceed to give their historic settings, their logical meaning in the context, their place in the theology of the writer, with a few practical reflections appended, are grossly misusing the Bible.”¹⁰²

Instead, Fosdick encouraged emulation of the writers of Scripture, who, to him, were interested most in human living. He wrote that preachers should “clearly visualize some real need, perplexity, sin or desire in his auditors, and then

¹⁰⁰ Henry Pitney Van Dusen, “Introduction,” in Harry Emerson Fosdick, *Riverside Sermons* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958), vii, as quoted in *What's the Matter With Preaching Today?*, ed. Mike Graves (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 3.

¹⁰¹ Harry Emerson Fosdick, “What's the Matter with Preaching?” *Harpers Magazine* 157, no. 938 (July 1928), 135, as quoted *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 10.

should throw on the problem all the light he can find in the Scripture or anywhere else. . . . The Bible is a searchlight, not so much intended to be looked at as to be thrown upon a shadowed spot.”¹⁰³

Relating to the practice of modern advertisers, Fosdick famously wrote that preachers should “plunge as directly as possible after contemporary wants, felt needs, actual interests and concerns. . . . Only the preacher proceeds still upon the idea that folk come to church desperately anxious to discover what happened to the Jebusites.”¹⁰⁴

To be fair, Fosdick proceeded to write harsh words for the supposed alternative to expository preaching, namely, topical preaching. He suggested that “instead of starting with a text, [topical preachers] start with their own ideas on some subject of their choice but their ideas on that subject may be farther away from the vital interests of the people than a great text from the Bible.”¹⁰⁵

It should be noted that Fosdick was no friend to conservative evangelicalism. His understanding of the practice of expository preaching is not accurate and his desire to begin with the “felt needs” of the listener has been followed by many. One result of Fosdick’s preaching model is today’s dearth of biblically informed Christians living and making a difference in the world. Indeed, Thomas Long writes that “one problem with preaching today is that we took Fosdick’s advice entirely too seriously.”¹⁰⁶ Long believes that Fosdick was

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 9-10.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 11.

¹⁰⁶ Thomas Long, “No News is Bad News,” in *Ibid.*, 146.

the first to address today's "highly individualistic religious consumer," and we are reaping the whirlwind in our age.

Long writes that Fosdick's great error in addressing the consumer is that Fosdick was "thinking Tiffany's. He never dreamed that the market was going to Wal-Mart."¹⁰⁷ He goes on to critique Fosdick's methodology by explaining that the great preacher was correct in addressing the listener's needs as long as those needs were important ones like doubt, fear, joy and worry. However, this type of preaching mindset will fail miserably, and it has, once the felt needs center on proper investing and good parenting and building intimacy in marriage. Long refers to the famous quote by Karl Barth, who once warned that "the Bible does not always answer our questions, but sometimes calls our questions into question."

Many today continue to question the relevance of preaching theologically. Doctrinal preaching is questioned from both sides of the liberal-conservative divide, according to Dan Doriani, the former Dean of Faculty and Professor of New Testament at Covenant Theological Seminary in Saint Louis.¹⁰⁸ Some conservative preachers say that doctrinal preaching is not sufficiently engaged in Scripture and is therefore inferior to preaching continuously through books of the Bible. For the liberal believer, it is thought that doctrinal preaching fails to engage the culture or the real-world needs of the listeners, touching only the mind and not the heart. In other words, doctrinal preaching is irrelevant.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 147.

¹⁰⁸ Dan Doriani, "Doctrinal Preaching in Historical Perspective," *Trinity Journal* 23 (Spring 2002): 35.

Both sides would argue that doctrinal preaching can serve as an intellectual exercise that serves only to divide Christians on minutiae. However, while it does engage the intellect, doctrinal preaching can serve more to unite on a common belief and even discourage division. Doriani admits that the some theological considerations are indeed seemingly irrelevant. However, the relevance is merely hidden, not absent. It is doubtful that an orthodox understanding of Jesus' hypostatic union will make an immediate difference to the businessman anxious about the rumors of downsizing at his company. While the doctrine of the true nature of Christ is vital to the Christian faith and is useful to fighting heretical teaching, Doriani admits that it does not "immediately demonstrate the principle uses of biblical truth."¹⁰⁹

Doriani acknowledges that there exists a class of theologians who do not even attempt to engage the layman, instead choosing to remain detached from real life. Doriani finally admits that while all doctrine is practical on some level, preachers often fall into unimaginative ruts in the determination of doctrinal practicality. For instance, a preacher might discuss God's omniscience and omnipresence but fail to reveal how these attributes of God and these abstract words can make a difference in the day-to-day walk of life.

With this in mind, preachers today must understand that doctrinal preaching is not antithetical to relevance. In fact, it is as relevant as any other form of preaching and more so than some. Many today want to preach "life lessons" that are filled with "how-to" lists for being happy or earning a comfortable living or raising well-behaved children. This type of preaching may entice larger crowds eager to get ahead in life or to at least endure life with a bit more ease. However, "congregations that are fed nothing more than ambiguous principles supposedly drawn from God's Word are doomed to spiritual

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

immaturity, which will become visible in compromise, complacency, and a host of other spiritual ills.”¹¹⁰

The arguments of “irrelevance” are invalid. Moises Silva argues that doctrinal preaching is inherently relevant:

It is proper and even necessary to approach the Bible with a strong sense of our needs. The problems faced in the gospel ministry often alert us to truths in Scripture that might otherwise remain veiled to us. Proper exegesis consists largely of asking the right questions from the text, and the life of the church can provide us with those very questions.¹¹¹

In other words, doctrinal preaching is relevant because it answers the very questions people are asking. Perhaps doctrinal preaching does not deal with needs raised on the surface level but most of the common questions people bring to church are theological in nature: Who am I? What is the purpose of life? What is wrong with me? What is wrong with the world? Can I or the world be fixed? If so, how? What is my role? What is my moral duty to others? What goals are worthy of the expenditure of my energy? How can I discern truth from so many conflicting claims of truth?¹¹² As Doriani says, these questions require doctrinal replies.¹¹³

Ellen Charry puts forth the thesis that great theologians of the past knew that Christian doctrines are good for us. Doctrine helps us by putting forth God as our model for living. So, theological knowledge is “knowledge for living.”¹¹⁴ This was the original intent of the preaching of Jesus, Paul, and the apostles. Their theology had moral

¹¹⁰ Mohler, “The Pastor as Theologian, Part Three.”

¹¹¹ Moises Silva, *Has the Church Misread the Bible?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 22, 101-111 as quoted in Doriani, “Doctrinal Preaching,” 36.

¹¹² Doriani, “Doctrinal Preaching in Historical Perspective,” 36.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ellen Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 6-11, quoted in Doriani, “Doctrinal Preaching in Historical Perspective,” 37

implications flowing from pastoral hearts. History even records this understanding in the writings of the church fathers and several generations afterwards.

However, this pastoral intent of theology began to dissipate at the time of the Enlightenment. The philosophy of this age led man to believe that “knowledge rests solely upon sense data and the power of reason to ascertain coherence among ideas.”¹¹⁵ Philosophers like David Hume and Immanuel Kant quickened the theological emphasis towards epistemology – the search for the certainty of Christianity’s truth claims. The idea of “faith” was pushed aside in the search for “certainty.” For the next two hundred years, the source of truth was sought in the fields of logic.

During this time, Charry asserts that theologians continuously “overlooked the roles of faith and wisdom in the gaining of knowledge. . . . The Enlightenment, with its interest in verifiable knowledge, in objective correctness, did not refute the possibility that wisdom for living is real knowledge; it simply forgot about it.”¹¹⁶ She notes the irony of this failure to remember because she claims that theological knowledge is more “practical” than scientific knowledge. Charry compares theological knowledge to the knowledge of a child enjoying life in the world by trusting in a loving parent. Reason and logic are important, but trust is essential if the goal is knowledge for living instead of epistemological certainty.¹¹⁷ It is this “knowledge for living” that forms the goal of the study of theology and the practice of doctrinal preaching.

Ironically, it is the quest for “knowledge for living” that has led many to reject doctrinal preaching in lieu of “practical” sermons on parenting, marriage, and success in the business world. Ernest Reisinger points out that this is a mistaken assumption because

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

“sound doctrine is to Christian experience what the bones are to the body, or, what the foundation is to the superstructure.”¹¹⁸ He goes on to note that our quest for a right understanding of how to live is determined by the

influence of sound biblical doctrine applied to the mind, the affections, and the will by the Holy Spirit. True religion . . . cannot be anything less than right thinking in respect to God, right feeling in respect to God, and right acting in respect to God. Therefore, true religion must reach the whole man. It must reach his mind because that is what he thinks with, it must reach his affections because that is what he feels with and it must reach his will because that is what he decides with. It is impossible to over-emphasize the importance of sound doctrine as the foundation for the Christian life, Christian worship, and Christian witness.¹¹⁹

Reisinger repeats the warnings of Doriani in saying that doctrine must contribute to the life of the believer. It cannot stoop to pure intellectualism which eventually leads to dead orthodoxy. In a clever phrase, Reisinger says that such a person may be “doctrinally as straight as a gun barrel and just as empty.”¹²⁰

Robert Kysar, Professor of Preaching and New Testament at Candler School of Theology, Emory University, Atlanta agrees with Reisinger. He writes that “the experiential roots of doctrine are the crucial element” in doctrinal preaching, adding that “traditional doctrine has been endowed with an abstract life of its own.”¹²¹ Likening the study of theology to a sport, Kysar says that “theology is too often conceived as a theoretical, cognitive game played by the gifted without much regard to reveal the real, visceral relevance of the sport.”¹²² Toward this end, the laity cannot see the connection between their all too real lives and biblical doctrine. It is for this reason that many choose

¹¹⁸ Ernest Reisinger, “Doctrine and Devotion – Part 2,” *Founders Journal* 4 (Spring 1991): 6.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Robert Kysar, “New Doctrinal Preaching for a New Century,” *Journal for Preachers* 22:3 (Easter 1997), 19.

¹²² Ibid.

a church for its programs, music style, or proximity to their homes as opposed to the church's doctrinal positions. In many families across the country, a church can be Baptist or Methodist or Lutheran or Presbyterian as long as the children are cared for and the worship service is not boring.

Doctrine must be seen as relevant because it is relevant. For example, in the church I serve, I recently lead a twelve-week discipleship course on eschatology. As part of that course, the discussion focused for several weeks on one doctrine that most still find engaging: the Rapture. However, I noted that in the passages that seem to speak most clearly about the Rapture, the "big idea" of the author remains the resurrection of the dead. The modern Christian is obsessed with understanding the Rapture, but the biblical writers only discuss it as a secondary issue related to the resurrection of believers at the second coming of Christ.

During that course, one attendee's mother passed away at the age of eighty-four. Standing in front of the casket with this gentleman, I asked him what was more important to him at that very moment: his potential rapture or the future resurrection of his mother. Instantly, he saw the connection and realized "the blessed hope" of the believer in Christ (Titus 2:13) is the promise of the resurrection. The doctrine of the Second Coming became very real to at that moment. It was powerful and affected a change in his outlook regarding the death of his mother.

Of course, this does not have any effect on the validity of the doctrine. True doctrines are true even if no congregant sees the relevance of it. This practice only helps the congregant see that doctrine is relevant and does have a part to play in his or her life.

In doing so, Kysar's assertion is shown to be true: "effective doctrinal preaching will have to name the congregation's experience in relation to theological themes."¹²³

Doctrinal Preaching is Experiential

For many today, the Christian life is all about the experience. We are consumed with how we *feel* about certain things, such as the worship service and other individuals. However, the understanding that a right doctrine results in a change in our feelings is often missed.¹²⁴ Too often, a great emphasis is placed on the manipulation of feelings in the worship service in order to affect change in the emotional seat of the listener. The common thinking is that if we can get to their hearts first, then we have easier access to their minds. The biblical model is precisely the opposite: a correct understanding of doctrine leads to a correct emotional response. As Erickson puts it, "the believer's feelings are expected to result in what he or she believes."¹²⁵

For instance, in the Psalms, the writers often wrote great odes to joy and worship and then included the reasons for such heights of ecstasy. David wrote "I will sing to the LORD, because He has dealt bountifully with me" (Psalm 13:6). His understanding of his human condition and God's merciful and gracious dealings with him creates the desire to worship. David also wrote "Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken" (Psalm 16:8). His understanding of God's omnipresence and faithfulness gave him confidence and security.

The prophet Isaiah wrote "I will rejoice greatly in the LORD, My soul will exult in my God; For He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness" (Isaiah 61:10). It was Isaiah's soteriological understanding that led

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Erickson and Heflin, *Old Wine in New Wineskins*, 27.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

him to “rejoice greatly in the Lord.” The apostle Paul taught the Thessalonian believers particular eschatological principles and then instructed them to “comfort one another with these words” (1 Thessalonians 4:18).

Our Christian experience flows from our doctrinal understanding. The two are intertwined. Many think that believers must either be an intellectual Christian or an emotional Christian. As we see in these examples (and many more can be offered), a Christian will act based on what he or she knows. This action based on knowledge explains the odd practices of some Christian sects, such as the “laughing revivals” of the Toronto Blessing and other such events. A low understanding of worship and order in that tradition leads to sincere, yet misguided, practice. Orthopraxy follows orthodoxy.¹²⁶

In the same sense, Erickson says that doctrine is important because “being ultimately precedes doing.”¹²⁷ It is common today for people to measure worth and to establish identity based on what one does. This is perhaps best illustrated in how we introduce ourselves to others. I might say, “I am a pastor.” However, that is not who I really am. Pastoring is what I do.

At the same time, traits and qualities are equated with actions. Erickson explains by saying that we often refer to a person as honest because he or she tells the truth. This thinking is actually reversed. A person tells the truth *because* he is honest. Jesus said that good trees bear good fruit and bad trees bear bad fruit (Luke 6:45). The important thing is what comes out of a man, “for out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders” (Matthew 15:19). Our values and beliefs

¹²⁶ Obviously, this is not an absolute. Orthodox groups have allowed questionable practices in their traditions, as well.

¹²⁷ Erickson and Heflin, *Old Wine in New Wineskins*, 28.

dictate who we are. Doctrine and doctrinal preaching are valuable because our understanding of them determines who we are.

Doctrinal Preaching is Applicable

Christians live in a world with many competing ideologies. These differing ideologies lead adherents to make moral decisions. These decisions are therefore doctrinal in nature because they are based on a belief system. However, as Erickson says, this does not mean that society is debating Christian issues exclusively. It does mean that these are issues to which Christian doctrine speaks. For instance, a perennially hot topic in American society is abortion. Proponents have intelligently moved the issue away from the unborn child and placed the emphasis on the child bearer. However, the true issue will always be the child and the meaning of life. Christians must know what the Bible has to say about the value of life, the origins of life, and the Christian's need to protect life.

Many will argue that these are political issues. While the practical outworking of the issue is political, the root of the argument is doctrinal. Therefore, pastors should address them in the pulpit. Pastors who preach doctrinal sermons will equip their listeners to be in the world but not of it (John 17:16).

Doctrinal Preaching is Educational

The pastor is usually the most theologically astute member of the local church. Sometimes, however, the gap between the pastor and the laity is depressingly large. Sadly, some want the chasm to remain. Some think that to engage in theology is to put human reason above faith or to attempt to think the very thoughts of God. There is no doubt that doctrinal studies can damage the faith of some individuals. However, “the

solution to bad theology is not no theology but good theology.”¹²⁸ Doctrinal preaching addresses this chasm by attempting to erase the illiteracy and the pervasive theological misunderstandings.

While some are apathetic towards theology and others are outright hostile, everyone is a theologian of some degree. Many think that a theologian (or a person who knows doctrine) is “an awesome creature who thinks deep and disturbing thoughts that very few people can understand.”¹²⁹ It appears that many believe there is a wide gap between the pastor/theologian and the layperson. This gap can be closed or removed once people realize that everyone is a theologian. We all deal with issues of life, and we all formulate solutions to these issues based on what we know. It only remains to be seen if an individual is a good theologian or a bad theologian.

Anselm, a monk in Canterbury, said that theology is “faith seeking understanding.” Many might argue differently today, but the proper order is not “understanding and then believing.” Rather, as Grenz and Olson state, “theology is seeking to understand with the intellect what the heart – the person’s central core of character – already believes and to which it is committed.”¹³⁰ Paul writes in Ephesians 2:8-9 that faith is a gracious gift from God.¹³¹ That faith is confirmed by our understanding of God as He reveals Himself in Scripture. No one has ever become a Christian on reason alone.

Therefore, this “seeking to understand with the intellect what the heart already believes” is the goal of doctrinal preaching. The preacher “proclaims God’s Word for the

¹²⁸ Grenz and Olson, *Who Needs Theology?*, 51.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 13.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 16.

¹³¹ Grammatically, in the phrase “it is the gift of God,” the pronoun “it” is neuter. However, there are no neuter antecedents so “it” must refer to the entire phrase - “by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves.” Salvation is a gift, grace is a gift and faith is a gift.

purpose of calling the listener to trust in God.”¹³² A pastor will preach doctrinal sermons to assist his listeners in this search for understanding. However, the goal is not easily reached.

The Difficulty of Doctrinal Preaching

Diamonds and pearls are valuable because of the difficulty in obtaining them.

These valuable items do not come from the earth or the oyster as beautiful items. They must be made to look beautiful by precise craftsmanship and much polish. In the same way, doctrinal sermons do not occur easily. These types of sermons are valuable because they are difficult to produce and yet are more beneficial once delivered than precious gems or stones. The difficulties of doctrinal preaching are also found in most other types of preaching, particularly expository preaching. However, there are some particular difficulties that appear in doctrinal expository preaching, and identifying these problems only helps the pastor to navigate the process. Erickson says that some of the difficulties are inherent in preaching while others find their origin in the culture in which we live and the traditions of the people in that culture. All of these obstacles must be observed and overcome.

Obstacles in Theologians

Grenz and Olson make the statement that everyone is a theologian. The difference between the layman in the pew and the professor in the academy is one of degree, not kind.¹³³ We either do sound theology or unsound theology, and the degrees of difference are important.

¹³² Stephen Nelson Rummage, *Planning Your Preaching: A Step-by-Step Guide for Developing a One-Year Preaching Calendar*, (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic and Professional Publishers, 2002), 34-35.

¹³³ Grenz and Olson, *Who Needs Theology?*, 13-14.

The two authors postulate that every Christian who thinks exists somewhere on a “spectrum of reflection.”¹³⁴ Between the two extremes are various levels of thoughtfulness and reflection on theology. By reflection, I mean formalized thinking – using the mind to organize thoughts and beliefs, to bring them into coherence with one another, and to make certain there are good reasons for such thinking.

This act of reflection entails by necessity a bit of critical thinking. We are to question the ways we think and why we believe and act the way we do. In our lives and our theologies, we are to be *semper reformanda* – “always reforming.” This involves the use of logic and historical awareness as well as some amount of objectivity towards assumed beliefs and practices, the very point at which most of us fail.

Grenz and Olson place at one extreme the “folk theologian.”¹³⁵ This individual usually refuses to think reflectively on his beliefs, and instead holds a particular position regarding a certain tradition based on blind faith. This does not speak to a simple faith but to a simplistic one based almost entirely on clichés and slogans.

Within this type of thinking exists areas of degree. At one extreme is the “tabloid theologian;”¹³⁶ a person who constructs his or her beliefs based on naïve information, no scriptural basis, and very little, if any, evidence. This person is often persuaded because of a particular teaching’s appearance of originality and “cutting edge” thinking. Grenz and Olson give examples of tabloid theology such as a belief that scientists in Russia drilled too far into the ground and opened a portal into the pits of hell or a belief that scientists have discovered a “missing day” that backs up the account of the sun “standing

¹³⁴ Ibid., 26.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 27.

¹³⁶ Michael Patton and Rhome Dyke, *The Theology Program: Introduction to Theology*, (Plano, TX: Biblical Studies Press: 2002), 25. This initial category of “tabloid theologian” is provided by Patton and Dyke. The remaining theological “types” are provided by Grenz and Olson.

still” in the tenth chapter of Joshua. These “beliefs” spread rapidly through the internet and email and are quickly forwarded to yet more email recipients, and to some minds, consequently. One belief that I encounter several times a week is the proposition that that if you forward a “Christian email” you will be immeasurably blessed, but if you fail to forward that email, you will suffer dire consequences. Many Christians send the message ahead – just in case the threat is real.

The tabloid theologian is extreme. More prevalent is the “folk theologian” – a person who uncritically and unreflectively constructs a theology according to traditions and religious folklore.¹³⁷ It needs to be said that there is incorrect and correct folk theology. Most Christians have learned from childhood through traditions. However, it is possible that many do not always know why they believe what they believe.

The folk theologian is often extremely dogmatic. The chief characteristic of folk theology is its attachment of unquestioning belief to a highly informal and unsubstantiated tradition and the refusal to measure it by any kind of objective critical inspection. Thus, any attempt to examine doctrines objectively is “unspiritual.” The attitude of the folk theologian is “My mind is already made up – Don’t confuse me with the facts!”¹³⁸

Individuals in this camp will reject theological preaching for several reasons. Some will use the “killjoy objection,” saying “God and His Word are meant to be enjoyed. Theology just examines them to death and takes all the life out of the believer’s relationship with God.”¹³⁹ This individual typically has a very superficial understanding of his belief system and does not appreciate the pastor who “rocks the boat” by asking

¹³⁷ Grenz and Olson, *Who Needs Theology?*, 27.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 28.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 55.

him to examine critically why he believes what he believes. The main goal of the person using this objection is to “feel good,” and his beliefs, misguided though they may be, help him through life.

For instance, I have been involved in email exchanges with an alleged believer from Canada who told me that he changed his mind on the doctrine of salvation after the birth of his mentally handicapped son. He believes that his son, now nineteen but functioning as a one year old child, will have the opportunity to accept Christ after his death because only then will he be able to understand the gospel. It matters not to this father that such a theological position is not found in Scripture. It matters only that his position helps him feel better about the eternal destiny of his beloved son. Thus, Christianity is reduced to subjective emotionalism where any belief is acceptable if it brings peace of mind.

Others will use the charge that doctrine brings only division in the church. It is a fact that members of churches have divided over fine points of Scripture. Some would want everyone to simply acknowledge that they “love Jesus” and be done with all theological wrangling. However, individuals who state this must be asked “Is the Jesus you love the Jesus of the Bible?” Grenz argues that “the primary purpose of theology is neither to divide nor to unite but to discover and protect truth.”¹⁴⁰ Sometimes it is necessary to divide over theology but all pastors must be convinced that truth trumps fellowship.

Grenz and Olson point out yet another argument the folk theologian may use: theology is mostly speculative in nature and therefore useless. It is argued that God does not want us to know everything, and therefore it is wrong to attempt to discern the mind

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 61.

of God. It is true that many have gone farther than they should in using logical implications of certain doctrines to lead to spurious ones. However, it is not wrong to infer some teachings from the less clear yet still present teachings of the Bible as long as that teaching is explained more clearly elsewhere.

A final argument the folk theologian may use is the “stalemate indictment.”¹⁴¹ This position argues that Christians have discussed certain issues at length, and no resolution is in sight. With this in mind, the person will simply say, “Who cares and why should I bother?” However, it seems that this individual will only be satisfied with consensus among all Christians. The study of Scripture is not the search for absolute certainty. Many doctrines are simply not as clearly delineated in Scripture as others.¹⁴² There can be progress in theological discussion as long as progress is not defined as a movement towards world-wide agreement.

It should be evident that folk theology is not to be the final stopping point for the believers in our churches. This position encourages belief in almost anything since no proof is needed or desired. Some examples of folk theology include the contemporary interest in angels, the interest in near death experiences, various views on heaven (mansions on hilltops, angels playing harps while resting on clouds, St. Peter at the Pearly Gates), demon possession, and the “King James Only” position.

The next position on the spectrum is that of the “lay theologian,” a “quantum leap” from folk theology. At this stage, the individual begins to think critically about his

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 63.

¹⁴² Even Peter wrote of Paul’s writings that “there are some thing in them *hard to understand*, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures” (2 Peter 3:15-16). (Italics mine).

beliefs.¹⁴³ This individual probably does not have the means, the time, or the access to proper resources required for this degree of reflection, but at least this individual is seeking biblical understanding.

For instance, the lay theologian raised in a dispensational premillennial context will begin to look in the Bible for the existence (or lack thereof) of a two-stage return of Christ separated by seven years of tribulation. The lay theologian struggling with the doctrine of election will begin to notice the discrepancy between the repeated assertions that man's free will is the determining factor in salvation and the fact that everyone prays as if God alone is the determining factor in anyone's salvation. A Sunday School teacher might begin to question the "party line" of the denominational literature. A worshipper might begin to examine more thoughtfully the lyrics of the songs sung on Sunday morning. All of this is good and is a step in the right direction for the person in the pew.

The next level of theologian given by Grenz and Olson is the "ministerial theologian,"¹⁴⁴ educated in theological methodology and able to use study tools and resources at a more effective level. He or she is able to openly critique personal theological positions against competing models and is intent on devoting more time to reflection so that theological integration can take place.

The title of this position is misleading. The authors do not mean that only ordained ministers are able to attain to this position. Indeed, many churches see the need for laymen to study and to be educated in order to fulfill their roles as teachers and leaders. This is the level that pastors should seek to lead their listeners to attain.

¹⁴³ Grenz and Olson, *Who Needs Theology?*, 29.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

The next level is the “professional theologian.” This person studies theology “for a living” and is well acquainted with all the tools of the trade.¹⁴⁵ Professional theologians exist to teach the ministerial theologian.

Finally, at the far end of the spectrum lies the “academic theologian.”¹⁴⁶ This individual constructs his theology as a philosophical frame with an overly speculative and critical spirit. His work is aimed primarily, if not completely, towards other academic theologians. His benefit to the local church is negligible as his thoughts are often completely disconnected from the Christian life.

The question that pastors must answer is two-fold; where do they fall on this spectrum, and where do the members of their congregation fall on this scale. The goal of the pastor who wants to teach doctrine to his listeners is to help them progress towards being ministerial theologians. Some will reject this, content to remain in the ignorance of the tabloid or folk theologian. The work of the doctrinal preacher is a difficult one. It is, however, also a necessary one. Charles Ryrie has said that everyone is a theologian, and “there is nothing wrong with being an amateur theologian or a professional theologian.” However, he did go on to say that “there is everything wrong with being an ignorant or sloppy theologian.”¹⁴⁷

Obstacles in the Individual

It seems obvious to most that the worshipper of today is different than the person who sat in the same pew a generation ago. Much has changed in our culture and in our churches since our fathers and grandfathers worshipped. This change is not limited to

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 31-32.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 33.

¹⁴⁷ Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, (Wheaton, IL: Moody Press, 1986), 9.

technology and communication. Our culture has elicited certain changes in the churchgoer, which Erickson and Heflin delineate.¹⁴⁸

First, today's listeners are eminently practical and therefore generally apathetic towards abstractions.¹⁴⁹ Doctrine is seen as merely theoretical in most regards and therefore, is deemed inconsequential. Instead, today's listeners want "how-to" sermons that mesh easily with the day-to-day schedule of their hectic lives. Stopping to think and reflect thoughtfully only slows people down. Erickson says that "stated simply, church members have grown apathetic about spiritual matters due to the influence of our highly pragmatic culture."¹⁵⁰ They are more concerned with how to "enjoy life, not how to have life." When it comes to theological subjects, many would prefer to simply be told what to believe instead of working through the thoughts and ideas themselves.

With that in mind, we notice secondly that in preaching doctrinally to a wide assortment of individuals, the preacher or teacher will not be able to satisfy everyone's intellectual needs. William Carl writes that "the first step in correctly appropriating and preaching theology is to know the audience one is addressing."¹⁵¹ "The church" is not a homogeneous group asking a single, specific question. The Body of Christ assembled on Sunday morning at First Baptist Church of Anytown, USA does not come together as a single group asking as one, "How do we reconcile divine sovereignty and human responsibility?" The congregation is not one entity but an assortment of different personalities with different agendas, backgrounds, needs, and questions. Carl quotes

¹⁴⁸ Erickson and Heflin, *Old Wine in New Wineskins*, 76-93.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 76.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 77.

¹⁵¹ Carl, *Preaching Christian Doctrine*, 15.

Leander Keck in identifying at least seven types of Christians in the typical church service:

1. *The Super-Patriots*: these individuals will not stand for any criticism of the church;
2. *The Cynical Citizens*: these people continue to support the church but sometimes wonder why;
3. *The Tourists*: those who barely understand the most basic beliefs of the Christian faith;
4. *The Resident Aliens*: those who believe that religion is a good thing but that is as far as it goes – Jesus was a good man, nothing more.
5. *The Expatriates*: those who bear the scars of earlier religious experiences but have long since moved away from the church, appearing sporadically to see if things have finally changed;
6. *The Reformers*: those who want to change everything about the church, including social activists, evangelicals and charismatics; and
7. *The Church Bureaucrats*: the clergy who believe they are indispensable.¹⁵²

Carl suggests that Keck omitted one more group: the Faithful Few, those who deeply believe the teachings of the Christian faith.

Along these same lines, Michael Patton and Rhome Dyck, staff members at Chuck Swindoll's Stonebriar Community Church in Frisco, Texas, list nine different types of persons present during a doctrinal sermon or series:

¹⁵² Ibid., 17. Carl notes that Leander Keck imparted this information in a lecture given at Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia, July 1977.

1. *Practical Priscilla*: You are a person who has never seen the practicality in deep theological study so you have always avoided it. You are here to see if we can change your mind.
2. *Scared Susan*: Big words scare you. You don't really think that you are smart enough to be here. You are here this time, but you may not be here next week.
3. *Know-it-all Nick*: You already know everything. You are just here to see if we get it right—and to correct us when we err and to pick up where we leave off.
4. *Fundamental Fred*: You are the God-ordained guardian of orthodoxy. You are here to sit, with arms crossed, and protect the faith handed down once and for all for the saints.
5. *Want-an-answer Will*: You have a lot of questions. You are here not to do theology in community, but to write theology down with a pen and paper.
6. *Traditionalist Teri*: You want to learn, but your traditions and preconceived notions bind you. You don't want to hear different viewpoints. You are here to have your traditions confirmed to be true.
7. *Confrontational Carl*: You are not a believer in Christ or the Bible and have no intention of becoming one. You are here to argue or even heckle.
8. *Struggling Sam*: You are a believer in Christ, but you have a lot of doubts and struggles. You have never had a safe place to express those doubts. You are here to see if this is the place.
9. *Curious Carla*: You are not really sure why you are here, but you're excited to find out.¹⁵³

¹⁵³ Patton and Dyck, *The Theology Program: Introduction to Theology*, 13.

This vast multitude of varying opinions and backgrounds places the preacher or teacher in a very difficult position. Roger Olson writes of a meeting with a student in his first year of teaching on Christian Theology. It seems a particular student was struggling with the content of the class and expressed her frustration by saying, “Why don’t you just tell us what the truth is about every subject we study? It confuses us when you present several options and leave it up to us to decide what to believe.”¹⁵⁴

Soon after this student left his office, another appeared. He also had a complaint, saying, “I feel that you concentrate too much on indoctrinating us. You know so much and have so many firmly held views that it doesn’t leave much room for forming our own opinions. I wish you would just tell us what the options are and leave it up to us to come up with our own theological interpretations.”¹⁵⁵

These two incidents led Olson to ponder how he, or any teacher, could successfully teach a topic to such a wide assortment of people with so many interpretations and opinions. We will pick up this question later in the major section of this chapter. For now, we continue with more difficulties that present themselves in preaching doctrinally.

A third obstacle in today’s listener is the entertainment-oriented society that breeds a tendency to focus on the style of the messenger instead of the substance of the message. Our celebrities are today’s heroes – professional athletes, movie stars, rock stars, and television stars. In the modern church, our heroes are pastors, most commonly pastors of very large churches. Just as many people want to know the opinions of actors and athletes before making purchases or forming their own ideas, Christians want to

¹⁵⁴ Grenz and Olson, *Who Needs Theology?*, 68.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 69.

know what today's super-pastors think about secular or spiritual matters. To elevate their ministry into this upper echelon of churches, pastors of smaller churches clamor for the latest program

Sadly, the same worldly attitude has entered the church, and many belong to the "cult of personality." People follow "TV preachers" and "radio preachers" who are deemed trustworthy because it is believed they could not be on the airwaves otherwise. Yet everyone is familiar with the doctrinal laxity of certain television and radio stations. Held in much lower esteem is the local preacher who faithfully and dutifully stands in the pulpit week after week addressing the same group of listeners. He is doomed to failure when held in comparison with such entertaining luminaries around him.

This sense of a personality-driven ministry is further heightened in a new generation of believers. The church is just now seeing a group of young adults enter the worship center after spending their entire lives attending church but being separated from their parents and other adults in children's ministry and youth ministry. These ministries have tailored every aspect of the Sunday morning worship service to meet the felt needs of this generation. Now, finally, these individuals enter "big church" and will not tolerate anything less than that to which they have grown accustomed. The preacher who desires to preach expository sermons, much less doctrinal expository sermons, faces a monumental challenge in satisfying these consumers.

Fourth, these same listeners, and even the generation that sired them, are quickly growing more and more impatient. As Fosdick mentioned in his article, "Within a paragraph or two after a sermon has started, wide areas of any congregation ought to

begin realizing that the preacher is tackling something of vital concern to them.”¹⁵⁶ This gem within Fosdick’s article is actually good advice. Listeners are indeed anxious for speakers to clue them in as to whether or not they should invest considerable energy into paying attention to the sermon. If the sermon is televised into their homes, the remote control is within arm’s reach. If the sermon is heard in person, the internal clicker of the mind is even closer. Doctrinal sermons take time to produce in the pastor’s study and time to deliver in the pulpit. It also takes time and work in the mind of the listener to assimilate all the information. This time is a formidable foe in both instances. The pastor can defeat this foe by revealing the relevance of the particular doctrine to the lives of the listeners.

Fifth, there is little sense of commitment in today’s worshipper. It is not uncommon for a family to leave a church over the smallest perceived slight. Doctrinal preaching, by its very nature, goes directly to the very tender areas of cherished beliefs and closely-held doctrines. In some churches, to preach a different doctrine than one long held is tantamount to a resignation. For instance, in a Southern Baptist church, a preacher will preach at his own peril a doctrinal sermon on the posttribulational rapture of the church or the doctrines of grace. Either the church members will become upset, leave, or he will be asked to cease preaching such things. None of these outcomes is desirable.

Sixth, the preacher faces much stiffer competition for the minds of his listeners than did his forebears. In a time not long distant, the church was the place to go to see major community events. The church was the hub of the community.¹⁵⁷ Pastors can no

¹⁵⁶ Harry Emerson Fosdick, “What’s the Matter with Preaching?” *Harpers Magazine* 157, no. 938 (July 1928), 135, as quoted in *What’s the Matter With Preaching Today?*, 9.

¹⁵⁷ David Wells, *No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 17-52. Wells details the decline of the church’s influence in the

longer claim that position. Families and individuals can hear sermons on the television or on the internet. It is difficult for the local preacher to compete with the polished orators in the various media. Furthermore, the media itself offers competition to today's pastor. Listeners demand to "see" as well as "hear" the sermon. Today's churchgoers want to be visually and aurally stimulated by much more than a single speaker's voice. In comparison to much of today's entertainment, the church is too docile and peaceful a place – even boring. In this atmosphere, doctrinal preaching is more difficult than the typical "felt needs" type of preaching.

Seventh, we live in an increasingly anti-intellectual age. We are not anti-science or anti-technology. We are anti-mind, consequently, preachers often fail to engage the mind.¹⁵⁸ Sproul warns that it is folly to listen to the canard that the "worst approach to people today is a rational appeal or even a pure exegetical admonition from Scripture."¹⁵⁹ He encourages pastors to understand that God gave His human creation minds, and God intended for that mind to be the way we receive information and respond to the analysis of that information. Consequently, Sproul asserts that to compromise our teaching and preaching by accommodating to a "temporary fad of mindlessness" is to "deny the very nature of divine creation."¹⁶⁰ He goes on to say that he believes that "the preacher who will appeal to the mind is the one who is going to get a much greater and broader hearing than the one who seeks to play catch-up with this crazy cultural direction."¹⁶¹ Sproul summarizes his position by saying that "if Jonathan Edwards walked into a church today

town of Wenham, Massachusetts in the first chapter. In 1854, the town voted by a 79-61 majority to build a town hall across the street from the town church. Wells writes that this was "an initial evidence of how all aspects of life were being reordered around secular structures" (page 24).

¹⁵⁸ R. C. Sproul, "Theology and Preaching Today", in *Communicate with Power: Insights from American's Top Communicators*, ed. Michael Duduit (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 181.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

and preached, in three years they'd have a mega-church and everybody would wonder why we quit preaching like Edwards in the first place!"¹⁶² Many who have labored through some of Edwards' sermons would surely disagree. However, whether or not you agree with Sproul's assessment, you must admire his desire to reach the mind of his listeners.

Eighth, today's churchgoers are easily and quickly distracted. They have much more to worry about than correct doctrine. To be sure, generations past had their worries and struggles. However, today's social and economic climate weighs heavily on listeners. The rising cost of gas seems to be of more importance than any problem spoken of in the Bible. People are so busy that the normal time for doctrinal instruction (Sunday morning) is now revered as a time to rest or to spend time with the family before heading back out into the real world.

Ninth, individuals of this era seem to have an aversion to authority. Any pastor who stands in the pulpit and proclaims doctrine dogmatically will be viewed with suspicion by many and skepticism by some. This disdain for authority is also revealed in people's views towards the Bible. A doctrine preached and built painstakingly upon biblical texts can be quickly and summarily dismissed by a listener because "that's not how my pastor taught me" or even "I don't like that teaching." Some might even go so far as to say that "I don't care what the Bible says - I'm not going to believe that."

This aversion to authority affects the reception of the preacher. With the wealth of information available online and on the airwaves, the preacher does not occupy the place of prominence he once did. The pastor used to be considered, at a minimum, the expert in the field of theology and more often as the "person of wisdom and integrity in the

¹⁶² Ibid.

community.”¹⁶³ Today, it is often felt that the pastor’s “opinion” is just as valid or invalid as anyone else’s opinion. No one wants to believe that the pastor has the “final word” on any subject.

However, this opinion is informed by a misunderstanding of what it means to speak with authority. Some point out that the preacher assumes authority because he has been ordained by a particular denomination. Others think authority stems from theological education. Still more think the authority of a pastor emanates from his understanding of the congregational subtext. All of these are partly right, but the real issue of authority is to understand that authority is derivative. We must therefore ask: From where does this authority come?¹⁶⁴ Allen, Blaisdell, and Johnston list as a possible reason for authority the suggestion that “the Bible undergirds the proclamation.” The authority of the preacher comes from the Bible he proclaims. Therefore, doctrinal preaching, properly done, is authoritative.

Tenth, competing ideologies make doctrinal preaching difficult. Worldviews such as naturalism and relativism make dealing with an intangible like doctrine difficult. It is a bad thing in our day to call something or someone “wrong.” James Davison Hunter says we live within the “ethic of civility,”¹⁶⁵ which means that truth has become secondary to etiquette. However, the doctrinal preacher must believe and say that he is right and that others are wrong. To deny this and to say that everyone is right is actually to say that no one is correct.

¹⁶³ Haddon Robinson, *Making A Difference in Preaching*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 31.

¹⁶⁴ Ronald Allen, Barbara Shires Blaisdell and Scott Black Johnston, *Theology for Preaching: Authority, Truth and Knowledge of God in a Postmodern Ethos*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 53.

¹⁶⁵ James Davison Hunter, *Evangelicalism*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 183-184, as quoted in Erickson and Heflin, *Old Wine in New Wineskins*, 41.

Eleventh, the attention span of today's listeners is noticeably shorter than in the past. Years ago, newspapers would reprint the entire length of political speeches. Today, we survive on two or three sentence "sound bites." The typical segment on the evening news is about a minute in length within the twenty minutes of the newscast's air time. In comparison, a typical sermon lasts about twenty minutes – the entire length of a news broadcast. It is difficult to imagine a listener sitting through a newscast that deals with only one story. It is even more difficult to imagine today's listeners dealing with the heavy logic and ordered sequence of Jonathan Edward's much longer doctrinal sermons of the eighteenth century.

Twelfth, today's listener is increasingly self-oriented. People seek after events and teachings that bring comfort and hope. Doctrinal sermons on such subjects as sin and God's wrath will not be "enjoyed" by the congregation. This self-orientation also gives birth to the belief that our own ideas are correct. Our interpretation is the right one because we are the ones who thought it. This idea of "rightness" soon becomes the authority by which doctrine is judged. For instance, many believe that God's primary attribute is love. Therefore, every other aspect of God must be delineated under this singular rubric of love. If a certain characteristic is not deemed "loving," then that attribute cannot be attributed to God. This is dangerously misleading in considering the doctrine of hell, justice, God's wrath and even election and predestination.

This radical individualism leads many to believe that "doctrinal beliefs are a matter of personal and private preference."¹⁶⁶ It is sometimes felt that not even the pastor

¹⁶⁶ Robert G. Hughes and Robert Kysar, *Preaching Doctrine for the Twenty-First Century*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 4.

has the right to tell an individual what must be believed if one wants to be a Baptist or Methodist or member of any specific denomination.

David Wells details the shift in our thinking by examining the contents of *Christianity Today*, founded in 1956, to be a journal of “international, interdenominational scholarship” with “the largest circulation in the world to the Protestant ministry and lay leadership.”¹⁶⁷ Wells analyzed the content of the magazine over the decades. In 1959, Wells discovered that twenty percent of the magazine was given to news regarding religious affairs, fifteen percent to the review of serious scholastic books, and thirty-six percent to exposition of Scripture or explanation of Christian doctrine. Thirty years later, those percentages had changed drastically. In 1989, the religious news coverage doubled from 20% to 40%. The book reviews had decreased from 15% to only 9%, and the biblical and doctrinal content had declined from 36% to only 8%. The remainder of the more modern magazine, over nineteen percent, was filled with “success stories about churches and ministries” and “personal testimonies.”¹⁶⁸ There was no content of this kind in 1959.

Wells notes that in 1959, the magazine had a regular section titled “A Layman and His Faith,” which dealt with biblical revelation, the person and work of Christ, the nature of the Gospel and salvation, human nature and sin. In 1989, this feature had been replaced by stories about the pain of growing up as a fundamentalist, mid-life crises, the problems of marriage, struggling with homosexuality, and other such personal and individualistic stories. He notes the wide differences in content, saying, “In three decades, the laity had apparently moved from a doctrinally framed faith, the central concern of

¹⁶⁷ Carl F.H. Henry, “The Mission of a Magazine,” *Christianity Today*, 12 October 1959, page 20, as quoted in Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 209.

¹⁶⁸ Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 209.

which was truth, to a therapeutically framed faith, the central concern of which was psychological survival.”¹⁶⁹ In one generation, *Christianity Today* had become “a poor cousin of *Time* magazine, basically a news magazine that was simply a little more pious and a little less interesting than the genuine article.”¹⁷⁰ It does not take much work to see the same transition happening in our pulpits.

According to Wells, *Christianity Today* had allowed biblical truth to be eclipsed by the self. Wells asserts that the decline of the magazine occurred when the editors began to ask what the audience wanted instead of agreeing on what the audience needed. At the same time, it must be noted from its inception, the magazine was given to pastors at no cost. When *Christianity Today* began to ask its growing list of subscribers to pay for the magazine, few pastors were willing to pay for it. Therefore, the magazine “branched out.”

The thirteenth obstacle the pastor must recognize is the growing influence of other world religions. For many today, all religions essentially “say” the same things but use different definitions. To these individuals, the Muslim’s “Allah” is the same as the Jew’s “YHWH” and the Christian’s “God the Father.” This lack of distinction creates an environment where discussing Christianity’s exclusivity is out of place.

Fourteenth, all of these factors combine with our cultural lack of permanence to produce a very mobile community that is rarely a true community at all. Wells writes that a sense of permanence is the “most obvious contrast between Wenham and our world” today.¹⁷¹ The world of Wenham, Massachusetts, prized permanence. Today, we cherish change. Wells notes that in Wenham, houses, clothing, and other articles were built to

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 42. See also footnote 157.

last. Furniture was handed down from one generation to the next. In our modern society, we build obsolescence into our products, making them easier to replace than to repair.

Sadly, this attitude of impermanence may be acceptable in secular society.

However, the same mindset often creeps into our churches unaware. This attitude reveals itself in the movement of individuals from church to church in the same town because of petty misunderstandings and personal sleights. It should not be this way. The idea of permanence, according to Wells, comes from a proper understanding of the Divine. Wells writes that “the norms, values and principles that were once seen to be enduring absolutes, along with the knowledge of God in which they were grounded, now seem quite uncertain and perishable, anything but the markers that once provided safe moral passage through life.”¹⁷² A preacher who preaches a doctrinal sermon must be prepared to deal with individuals who would rather leave the church than work through the process of understanding that doctrine with the pastor and their community of believers.

Obstacles in the Church

When individual listeners who present obstacles to doctrinal preaching gather, they form a church which may present different obstacles once gathered. Erickson lists several internal and external obstacles in the church as a body.¹⁷³

First, many churches fail to put any emphasis on doctrine. The use of creeds and confessions has declined drastically over the years, and some see any such formalization of beliefs as troublesome. When people join a church, the only question usually asked is “Are you saved?” and in some instances, “Have you been baptized?” If these two questions are answered correctly, membership is granted regardless of other important

¹⁷² Ibid., 44.

¹⁷³ Erickson and Heflin, *Old Wine in New Wineskins*, 89-93.

doctrinal considerations. Doctrinal precision is often supplanted by a greater desire for church fellowship and a pragmatic misunderstanding of Paul's words to "be all things to all people." Of course, in some instances, doctrinal unity is sacrificed for the desire of greater numbers in the local church.

Second, denominational ignorance is rampant in churches today. It is obvious to all that there exists in almost every town churches that are Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Catholic and many others. However, the members of these churches sometimes cannot name the distinguishing characteristics of each without entering into stereotypical generalizations such as "these dunk'em and those sprinkle'em." At the same time, an inquiry into the rationale behind these baptismal practices typically produces blank stares.

Heflin say this has not always been the case. The author tells the story of two nineteenth-century Swedish Baptists in Minnesota,¹⁷⁴ John and Brita Sundstrom, who came to America to escape religious persecution. However, in rural Minnesota, the nearest Baptist church was eleven miles from their home. Many of today's worshippers would have attended the nearest church of their liking. However, this couple walked twenty-two miles each Sunday with their infant daughters on their backs. After doing this faithfully for several years, John began work as the founding lay-pastor of a Baptist church in his small town. This church believed so strongly in believer's baptism that converts in the winter of 1876 did not want to wait until the spring thaw. Instead, the three-feet thick ice on Rush Lake was cut and thirty-two people were baptized in the freezing waters. In 1878, the number of baptized reached fifty-four. Obviously, to these people, the doctrine of baptism was important. It meant something to these Christians to

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 48.

also be known as “Baptist.” How strange this story must seem to today’s “seekers” and even many of today’s pastors.

With no denominational heritage to cling to and to preach from, pastors struggle to unite believers under the canopy of doctrinal similarities. Denominations are formed because of a difference in theology. Yet, doctrinal matters have become less and less important as the reason to join any particular church. This trend towards abandonment of denominational loyalty leads many churches to drop their denominational identifiers and to change names to such bland designations as “Insert-Housing-Development-Here Community Church” or “Insert-Street-Name-Here Fellowship” or “Insert-Generic-Religious-Sentiment-Here Church.” These names reflect the emphasis of these churches – fellowship over doctrine.

Third, a great number of programs at a typical church are not distinctly Christian in nature and thereby indirectly hinder the cultivation of doctrinal knowledge. Some larger churches provide coffee shops, recreational facilities, and even automobile repairs. All of these services are provided outside the church (and usually much better). As Erickson says, some churches are better known by what they do than by what they believe. Doctrinal beliefs are simply not something that many churches consider important in their sincere desire to reach out to their surrounding community.

Externally, we know that the culture demands and expects relevance instantly. Churches that cater to these demands give the “seekers” what they want – entertainment and sensory fulfillment. Consequently, the sermon is allotted a small portion of the time.

Fourth, the culture is fairly apathetic towards religion in general and often antagonistic towards faiths that believe in absolute truth. People do not know much about

Christianity because they are limited by what they hear in the news and read in the print media. The current love affair with Islam is often prefaced with a damning report on Christianity's exclusivism. Christianity is exclusive of all other religions and doctrinal preaching that accurately portrays this exclusive avenue to divine revelation will suffer in this climate of religious tolerance.

Fifth, mobility is a damaging agent to doctrinal preaching and church attendance in general. In the past, people most likely attended the denominational church in their neighborhood or town. Now, individuals can just as easily drive to hear a preacher of their liking in another town or county. While this is a potential benefit for the disgruntled worshipper, doctrinal preachers must realize that they do not have a captive audience. Listeners can simply go elsewhere the next week if they feel their needs are not being met.

Sixth, the way we access information today is another obstacle to the preacher. People can find any information they desire on the internet, cell phones, or satellite radios. In the church, these same people are told that they must sit and listen to one man dispense the information he finds relevant. While the listener cannot change the station or navigate to another website while sitting in the pew, he or she can make that decision to not return after this particular service is complete.

With these obstacles before him, the preacher is wise to attempt to analyze his audience. It is impossible to get a completely accurate description of the audience, but a "big picture" is a wonderful help. The pastor can analyze his audience by asking the following questions, as put forth by Stephen Rummage:¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁵ Stephen Rummage, *Planning Your Preaching*, 41-50.

1. How many people are in the audience? Different sizes will lead the wise preacher to change various aspects of his sermon.
2. What are the demographics of the audience? Variables include age, gender, education, ethnicity, religious background, and culture.
3. How interested is my audience? Rummage lists the five types of audiences: casual, passive, selected, concerted, and organized.¹⁷⁶ The casual audience shows the least amount of unified attention, akin to sightseers in a museum listening to a guide or the haphazard audience of a street preacher. The passive audience is the captive audience, one that listens because it must (such as at funerals or weddings and, too often, Sunday mornings). The selected audience is comprised of those who have gathered for a specific reason that is important to them. They have a great deal of interest in the announced message. I have preached to this audience on occasion during the Sunday night services at Western Avenue Baptist Church when I announce a particular topic. The concerted audience has a purpose and an interest in accomplishing some task, hoping to achieve some benefit from listening to the sermon. The final type, the organized audience, is a group of believers over whom the preacher enjoys considerable influence (or even control). Understanding the interest level will aid the preacher greatly in delivering a doctrinal sermon.

With each of these audiences, the speaker's challenge is different.¹⁷⁷ With the casual audience, the pastor's challenge is to get their attention. With the

¹⁷⁶ H. L. Hollingsworth, *The Psychology of an Audience*, (New York: American Book, 1977), 21, as quoted in *ibid.*, 45.

¹⁷⁷ Wayne V. McDill, *The Moment of Truth: A Guide to Effective Sermon Delivery*, (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1999), 43.

passive audience, the pastor's challenge is to awaken their interest. With the selected audience, the pastor's challenge is to make an impression. With the concerted audience, the pastor's challenge is to arouse conviction. With the organized audience, the pastor's challenge is to give direction.

4. What is the attitude of the audience? The audience comes with feelings, beliefs, and opinions that the pastor must deal with to effectively communicate doctrine. Rummage writes that an audience can be "favorable, indifferent or opposed."¹⁷⁸ Often, the very doctrine announced as the centerpiece of the sermon will determine the attitude.
5. How much does my audience know about the subject? The preacher can overestimate or underestimate knowledge, and both are disastrous for effective preaching. This is a very difficult for the visiting preacher, but the preacher who stands before the same congregation week after week will soon know the extent of general knowledge.
6. What is the spiritual condition of my audience? The same truths from above apply here. The pastor must determine to the best of his ability the approximate ratio of saved individuals to non-Christian listeners. If the audience is overwhelmingly non-Christian, certain doctrines should not be preached. Instead, the pastor should preach the doctrine of salvation in the form of a gospel presentation.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 47.

Obstacles in the Preacher

Erickson writes that in communicating doctrine, there are obstacles the listener brings to the event. There are also obstacles inherent in the preacher.

First, there are obvious time and priority pressures in the life of the pastor. Many pastors preach two and three times each week to the same congregation. If a pastor is going to preach well and treat the Word of God with the respect it deserves, preaching this often every week is nearly an impossible task. Added to this schedule are the myriad meetings, appointments, and counseling sessions a typical pastor must keep. As John MacArthur has said, the first thing a church should do is remove the tag of “Pastor’s Office” and replace it with the older term of “Pastor’s Study.”

There are other time restraints. Today’s worship service is often forty minutes of singing, leaving twenty minutes of preaching. It is difficult to preach a fully-developed doctrinal sermon in this length of time.

Second, pastors face an incredible pressure to succeed. It is not unusual for two pastors to meet and the first question to be asked is “What are you running in worship?” Deacons and elders often look at the bottom line of financial giving and worship attendance to measure the effectiveness of the pastor. The “church growth movement” has only fostered this mindset, as has the feverish publicity hyping today’s mega-churches and super-pastors. It is a strong temptation to avoid controversial subjects in an effort to appeal to as wide a base as possible and thereby offer no opportunity for offense.

Third, the success on any level mentioned above often catapults a pastor into the level of celebrity endorsement of his or her programming genius. These individuals are seen as “gurus,” offering secrets to growth and success in other churches. Some pastors are so consumed with increases in attendance, building, and giving that these programs

are purchased and followed with no contextualization. This pragmatic view of ministry is harmful to the local body. The typical church cannot replicate the mega-ministries of Willow Creek, Saddleback, or Houston's Lakewood Church.

Fourth, some pastors simply lack the training necessary to give due diligence to the doctrines of Scripture. In some areas of the country, education is seen as antithetical to a genuine gospel ministry. Some traditions prefer their pastors to be "led by the Spirit" as he or she preaches. This is often an invitation to just "wing it" in the pulpit instead of understanding that the Spirit can also operate on the pastor during the time of study.

The difficulties listed in this section might produce in some pastors the desire to eschew doctrine completely. For many, the pain and heartache is simply not worth the struggle. For others who are willing to overcome these difficulties, we now begin the process of learning how to prepare and deliver expository doctrinal sermons.

Preparing a Doctrinal Sermon

In North Carolina, there are 11,331 churches.¹⁷⁹ Within this number are 651 AME Zion, 175 Roman Catholic, 69 Nazarene, 252 Episcopal, 743 Presbyterian Church USA, 151 Primitive Baptist, 1,983 United Methodist and 3,527 Southern Baptist churches. It is difficult to imagine the incredible differences between all of these churches on a typical Sunday morning.

If one takes only the 3,527 Southern Baptist churches, the diversity of sermons on a typical Sunday morning would be amazing. The content would vary greatly from town to town and from church to church within the same town. Within each sermon, however, it is hoped that three constants remain: a biblical passage is read and commented upon,

¹⁷⁹ Adherents.com, "Religion By Location," *adherents.com*, January 28, 2006, http://www.adherents.com/adhloc/Wh_247.html#559, (accessed July 21, 2006).

illustrative connections with our modern world are made, and some form of application is given to the congregation regarding the message of the text studied.¹⁸⁰

Mike Graves, Associate Professor of Homiletics at Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Kansas, writes that it is within one of these three central areas of preaching that a problem resides – the sermon’s focus.¹⁸¹ The problem is not in the exegesis, though a number of errors are made there regularly. The problem is not in the illustrations. The problem lies, in Graves’ opinion, in “the move toward what the text means for the listeners, its focus.”¹⁸² It is in that move from the ancient text to the modern world that we “no longer look at the text through an exegetical microscope, but aim our telescopes into the larger theological solar system – that is where the problem occurs.”¹⁸³

In the title of the book he edited, Graves asks “What is the matter with preaching today?” In answer, Graves says “theology is the matter.”¹⁸⁴ He declares that many preachers focus their sermons on the listeners, on their human behavior, and on felt needs. This process leads the listener to think that they are the center of their own individual universe. Instead, Graves argues that we need to aim our “theological telescopes” heavenward. While speaking to our world in relevant fashion is the object of our message, the *subject* must forever remain God. We often and easily drift far from that subject in America’s pulpits. Graves says that we “repeatedly assume that sermons are primarily lessons for how people ought to be living.”¹⁸⁵ This pragmatic mentality quickly leads the sermon to degenerate into sheer moralization.

¹⁸⁰ Graves, *What’s The Matter With Preaching Today?*, 110.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 111.

Russell Moore, Dean of the School of Theology and Associate Professor of Christian Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, regretfully notes that as children, many learned that:

- Jesus' calling of the twelve is about the fact that “Jesus made friends.”
- Jesus' miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and the fish is about the idea that “Jesus wants you to share.”
- Noah's Ark can now be about the responsible care of pets.¹⁸⁶

Moore writes that after these lessons are learned, children are encouraged to live their lives the same way these biblical characters did in order that they too may be good boys and girls. With his tongue only slightly in his cheek, Moore says that “previous generations had a term for Bible study like this. It was called ‘Protestant Liberalism.’ And, in case we don't remember, it didn't lead to anything good.”¹⁸⁷

Our sermons often tend to meander down this same worn path. It is easy preaching, and it is preaching that our people have come to expect. As a result, Graves argues that “theology is the matter (the problem) with our preaching because theology is no longer the matter (the substance) of our sermons, at least not in responsible ways!”¹⁸⁸

Finding Doctrine

How do we get to the point where theology is the substance of our sermons?

There are many avenues to take for the preacher who desires to preach doctrinal sermons. Some directions will lead to more beneficial results, but all can be used.

¹⁸⁶ Russell Moore, “Children’s Sunday School and the Battle for the Bible,” *The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, May 20, 2004, n.d., <http://www.cbmw.org/news/rdm200504.php> (accessed June 21, 2006).

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Graves, *What’s the Matter with Preaching Today?*, 111.

Preaching Doctrine from a Concordance

One way to preach doctrinally is to find passages that contain the doctrinal word we wish to expound. Ryrie says that “a study of any number of words and/or phrases in a concordance will yield a gold mine of material for learning, preaching and teaching doctrine.”¹⁸⁹ Of course, this practice is much simpler with the advent of computerized bible programs such as *Logos* and *BibleWorks* (formerly *Hermeneutika*). All one has to do is type in a certain word, such as “atonement” or “redemption,” and he will quickly find each and every instance of that word in the particular version you are accessing.

Ryrie wisely cautions the reader that it is best to use a concordance or concordance program that is based on the original languages instead of an English translation, which often use different English words to translate the same Greek or Hebrew words. According to the King James Version, Paul and his colleagues “*rejoice* in hope of the glory of God . . . *glory* in tribulations . . . also *joy* in God.” The same Greek word (μ) is normally translated “rejoice” but is translated three different ways in this one passage. An extreme example is the Greek word *katargeo* (καταργέω). This word occurs twenty-seven times in the Greek New Testament, yet it is rendered into English in eighteen different ways.¹⁹⁰

For this reason, it is also helpful to consult numerous translations of modern Bibles. Ryrie instructs his readers to “be sure to note different ways the word or phrase you are presenting is translated in several translations being used by the audience.

¹⁸⁹ Ryrie, *Practical Guide to Communicating Bible Doctrine*, 40.

¹⁹⁰ The different ways this one word is translated are: abolish, cease, cumber, deliver, destroy, do away, become of no effect, fail, loose, bring to naught, put away, vanish away and make void,” with a few variances on these to make eighteen.

Otherwise, when you read a verse that uses the word you are studying, but a different translation uses a different word, listeners may think they have the wrong reference.”¹⁹¹

This practice is perhaps the easiest method to finding doctrine in the Scriptures. Ryrie lists several examples. The preacher may preach at a men’s retreat by researching what God has to say to males in particular, using the Greek word *(aner, husband)* or

(anthropos, man). Ryrie gives other suggestions as well: “finish” or “keep” (in Proverbs), “mourn” (in the New Testament), “predestinate, prosper, temperance,” among others.¹⁹²

However, it is also the practice most fraught with peril. It is possible that this method may lead to proof-texting, which is using passages out of their natural context in order to prove a point that the passage does not teach. For example, one might read John 12:32 as the motivation for worship and evangelism. In worship services all across the land, it is not uncommon to hear worship leaders proclaim that Jesus promised the following: “If I be lifted up, I will draw all men to Myself.” These individuals will then explain that if we “lift up” Jesus in worship by exalting Him above all else, then Jesus will draw all those in the congregation to Himself.

That admonition sounds good in a worship service. However, it is inaccurate. Jesus did not have this in mind when He spoke these words. Jesus actually said, “And I, if I be lifted up *from the earth*, will draw all men to Myself” (italics mine). Also, the second part of this verse is typically dropped: “But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die” (John 12:33). It makes no sense to think that Jesus was speaking of praise, and that this very praise would indicate the kind of death He would

¹⁹¹ Ryrie, *Practical Guide to Communicating Bible Doctrine*, 41.

¹⁹² Ibid., 47.

undergo. Instead, we clearly see that to be “lifted up” is to be crucified, as John also indicated earlier in 3:14-15.

However, another proof-texting error is possible with this same verse. It is possible that this verse is found in a concordance search for the English word “all” (Greek: *pan* or *hola*), which occurs 1,067 times in the New American Standard Bible.

It is common to hear the hackneyed phrase “‘All’ means ‘all’ and that’s all ‘all’ means.”

Therefore, this verse is brandished to teach that Jesus will draw all men to Himself equally. Is this what He meant? Is this what He has done? Has He drawn *all* people (every single individual who ever has or ever will live) to Himself through His crucifixion? What about the words of Christ in John 6, when He states that “No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:44).¹⁹³ Jesus declared that all those who are drawn will come AND they will be lifted up in the last day. It seems that Jesus is implying here that all who are drawn will eventually be saved. If Jesus does indeed draw *all* men, then all men will be lifted up in the last day.

Context again reveals the meaning behind Jesus’ words. Earlier in John 12, we read that “Now there were some Greeks among those who were going up to worship at the feast; these then came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and began to ask him, saying, ‘Sir, we wish to see Jesus’” (John 12:20-21). This leads directly into Jesus teaching that He has come to draw “all men,” by which He means not only Jews, but Gentiles as well. Indeed, Jesus will draw people from every tribe and nation to Himself.

¹⁹³ The Greek word for “draw” is *tracheo* in John 12:32 and *trahō* in John 6:44.

These examples alone should provide sufficient warning to be very careful when using a concordance to research doctrines for doctrinal preaching.

Preaching Doctrine from Biblical Illustrations

Ryrie writes that the preacher can preach doctrinal sermons based in biblical illustrations. He explains this by writing, “I do not mean using illustrations within a message . . . but rather starting with an illustration and then moving to the doctrine it illustrates.”¹⁹⁴ This brings to mind the typical children’s sermon as practiced in many churches. Children will be gathered near the front of the church and shown some common household object, such as a mousetrap. Then the speaker will talk about how the mousetrap works and what the purpose of a mousetrap before segueing into the doctrine. He will typically say, “Just as this mousetrap is designed to catch unsuspecting mice by tempting them with something they want or desire, so will sin do the same with you.”

Ryrie gives several examples in Jeremiah to explain.¹⁹⁵ In Jeremiah 18:1-23, the prophet explained how a potter made pots and jars out of clay. He noted that if a particular product was defective, the potter would simply make another out of the same lump (v. 4). Jeremiah and later Paul in Romans 9:19-24, used this image to teach about God’s sovereignty. God is the potter in this lesson, and we are the clay.

Later in this passage, Jeremiah spoke again of the broken jar. We read that the Lord told the prophet to “break the jar while those who go with you are watching, and say to them, ‘This is what the LORD Almighty says: I will smash this nation and this city just as this potter’s jar is smashed and cannot be repaired’” (Jeremiah 9:10-11). Ryrie even suggests that the pastor preaching this message smash his own clay pot on the platform!

¹⁹⁴ Ryrie, *Practical Guide to Communicating Bible Doctrine*, 48.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 49-51.

Other such passages in Jeremiah include the bonds and yokes on Jeremiah's neck (27:2) and the purchase of a field in Anathoth (32:1-24).

Jesus was the master at using illustrations to teach doctrine. He used such images as salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16), birds and flowers (Matthew 6:26-34), little children (Matthew 18:1-6) and lost coins, sheep and sons (Luke 15). Paul also used such illustrations as the potter (seen above), the olive tree to speak of God's elect through the ages (Romans 11:17-28), the bread and cup to speak of the New Covenant (I Corinthians 11:17-24), the human body to speak of spiritual gifts (Romans 12), and the unity of Christians (I Corinthians 12:12) and husbands and wives to speak of the union between Christ and His church (Ephesians 5:22-23).

Warren Wiersbe tells of an opportunity he had to speak to a high school audience on "the biblical view of sex ethics."¹⁹⁶ He tells of the disaster that ensued as he "unloaded a lot of theological baggage on them, most of which stayed in the conduit and was never picked up by the students."¹⁹⁷ He admits that a better approach would have been to show biblical examples of individuals who participated in sexual activities correctly and incorrectly. Wiersbe also writes that he should have used the images seen in Proverbs 5 of proper sexual love as a beautiful stream of refreshing water while sex outside of marriage is compared to a sewer running in the streets. Proverbs 6 says that sex is like a fire, able to assist or to harm man. Proverbs 7 speaks of a young man turning into "an animal" headed to the slaughterhouse as he falls prey to the call of the prostitute. Wiersbe notes that if he had used any of those images, his message would have been much more beneficial for his audience.

¹⁹⁶ Warren Wiersbe, *Preaching and Teaching with Imagination: The Quest for Biblical Ministry*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1994), 45.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

It is easy to see the benefit of this method of teaching doctrine. C. S. Lewis once wrote that “all our truth, or all but a few fragments, is won by metaphor.”¹⁹⁸ Pastors who wish to be effective in communicating doctrinal truth must realize that the Bible is not written the way today’s theologians would have written it. Today’s writers operate out of a western worldview, presenting information in short statements, often in bulleted lists for clarity, brevity, and ease of remembrance. When western Christians discuss a subject such as the doctrine of God, they are apt to create a list of abstract words such as omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, transcendence, immanence, and others. Of course, this leads to another inevitable step in the teaching process: defining these words that describe intangible things.

Most Christians quickly realize that these theological words are not found in Scripture. The biblical writers wrote from an eastern point of view, thinking of God in terms of images instead of abstractions. To the eastern mind, God was thought of as “living water,” “a rock,” “a fortress,” and “a shepherd.” These were the terms used by Hebrew parents to teach their children about the God they served. How strange and ineffective it would have been to the Israelite mind to teach a child an attribute of God using a term like “omniscience.”

Instead, William J. Carl says that “one of the best ways to do effective pointing in doctrinal preaching is to know the image that lies behind the doctrine, for that image can effectively bring the doctrine to life.”¹⁹⁹ Quoting David Buttrick, Carl says that in the process of delivering the doctrine in homiletical form, the “homiletician is a reverse

¹⁹⁸ Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, (London: SCM, 1983), 201 as quoted in Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Carl, *Preaching Christian Doctrine*, 28.

theologian.”²⁰⁰ Buttrick asked “How are you going to relate the doctrine of atonement to characters in the present world? You going to talk about sacrifice? You sliced any lambs’ throats lately? You going to talk about slavery? You bought any slaves?”²⁰¹ These biting questions bring to the surface a major obstacle in preaching doctrinal sermons – preachers must speak in concrete images. Carl declares that we dare not change the meaning of the doctrine, but we can change the image used to illustrate that doctrine.

Preachers (and parents) would do well to think in the eastern fashion in the conveyance of doctrine. We can use metaphorical and biblical language to teach our listeners (and our children) what the Bible has to say in its doctrinal teachings. This logical conclusion is a driving force behind preaching effective expository doctrinal sermons instead of the typical doctrinal sermon, which usually consists of an abstract statement followed by a list of proof-texts.

As beneficial as this practice seems to be, it is also easy to image the difficulty. The method should not be used too often at the risk of becoming formulaic and predictable. If used too frequently, the focus would be on the next object brought to the pulpit instead of the message delivered from that pulpit. Also, the preacher must spend considerable creative energy in finding the right object or illustration to represent the correct doctrine.

Preaching Doctrine from Confessions and Catechisms

Many denominations adhere to confessions of faith. Presbyterians normally utilize the Westminster Confession of Faith. Lutherans will often use the Book of Concord or the Augsburg Confession. Some Baptists will use the London Baptist Confession of Faith

²⁰⁰ David Buttrick, “Homiletics and Rhetoric,” (Lecture delivered at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, 16 April 1979), as quoted in *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

of 1644 or 1689. Even the Southern Baptist Convention, which has rejected creeds through the years, has its own “Baptist Faith and Message.”

Timothy George notes that many preachers will be “reluctant” to follow this approach because they would rather the sermon “arise directly from the Bible and not from human formulation.”²⁰² George notes that preachers need not see that as an *either/or* situation. He argues that confessions and catechisms are usually drawn directly from the Bible with a multitude of biblical references throughout. These confessions can be “useful device[s] for passing on the faith intact to the next generation.”²⁰³

Preaching Doctrine from the Church Calendar

There are times through the calendar year when Christians around the world focus on specific teachings of Scripture. The calendar is marked by dates that emphasize various parts of the life of Christ. Advent, occurring in the four weeks before Christmas, is a preparation time for the celebration of the birth of Jesus. Christmas occurs between December 25 and January 5. After this, Christians often celebrate Epiphany on January 6 to commemorate the presentation of the infant Jesus to the Magi.

After celebrating the beginning of Christ’s life at Christmas, many Christians turn their attention towards the end of Christ’s life. Lent is a forty day time of fasting from some material good in imitation of Jesus’ experience in the wilderness of temptation. Lent leads to Holy Week, the days between Palm Sunday and the Saturday before Easter. These days observe the events in the life of Jesus from His entry into Jerusalem through the crucifixion and burial. These previous events point to Easter, the celebration of the resurrection of Christ from the grave. Many Christians focus on

²⁰² George, *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, 97.

²⁰³ Ibid.

Pentecost, the celebration of the coming of the Holy Spirit to believers shortly after the resurrection and ascension of Christ. The festival is observed fifty days after Easter and occurs on the Jewish feast of Pentecost.

Many denominations use a lectionary, which is a book with detailed Scripture passages to read at certain times of the year. This tool will assist the pastor in knowing which themes and passages to focus on during different times of the church year. However, the negative aspect of this approach is that a lectionary is, by design, limited. Something had to be left out and entire books of the Bible are missing: Judges, Ruth, Ezra, Esther, Obadiah, Nahum, Haggai, Psalms, 2 John, 3 John, and Jude in one lectionary.²⁰⁴ The lectionary also fails to cover some of the major doctrines of the Bible, such as creation and hamartiology and anthropology.²⁰⁵ Listeners will miss much of the richness of the Bible if the lectionary is followed “religiously.”

Preaching Doctrine from Church Ordinances or Sacraments

Pastors can take advantages of natural teaching moments during the administration of the church’s ordinances. George writes that the “visible words of God in bread, wine and water should always be accompanied by thorough instruction.”²⁰⁶ In the church I serve, I have tried to follow this advice. When I baptize, I am always careful to explain to our members and any guests in the congregation exactly what it is that they are seeing and, possibly more importantly, what they are not seeing. As with most Southern Baptists, we do not celebrate the Lord’s Supper weekly. With the more sporadic observance, we often give the entire service over to the administration of the elements with periods of teaching time between the wine and the bread.

²⁰⁴ Carl, *Preaching Christian Doctrine*, 43.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ George, *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, 98.

However, George writes that the doctrinal teaching need not be solely dedicated to the ordinances themselves. He suggests that a message on church unity would be appropriate while celebrating communion, and discipleship would be appropriate in a baptismal service.

Preaching Doctrine from Great Hymns

Hymns are slowly fading from memory in some quarters, and that is a tragedy. George understands the importance of hymns as he writes that “hymns have often been the primary carriers of Christian meaning for many believers. They are best used, however, in concert with sound theological exposition.”²⁰⁷ To be sure, there are many hymns that remain popular even though the message espoused is weak and man-centered. However, the vast majority convey in memorable fashion many wonderful doctrinal truths.

Raymond DeLaurier wrote “Using Hymns to Preach Biblical Doctrine” for his Doctor of Ministry thesis-project for Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in 2003. He writes that his thesis “seeks to legitimize and demonstrate the practice of using hymns to preach Biblical doctrine. . . . Hymns can be used to teach doctrine and the music accompanying the hymn will cause that doctrine preached to be remembered.”²⁰⁸ DeLaurier uses the great hymn “Immortal, Invisible” by Walter Chalmers Smith and John Roberts as an example of how to teach of the nature of God.²⁰⁹

Similarly, there are great doctrinal truths in such familiar hymns as “Hark, the Herald Angels Sing.” Preaching the truths found in this song will be a welcome respite to

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Raymond A. DeLaurier, *Using Hymns to Preach Biblical Doctrine*, (D.Min. thesis-project, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2003), ii.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 80-84.

the pastor wondering how to make the annual late December sermon memorable. In this song, the preacher will be able to speak of Christ as King (Zechariah 9:9), God and sinners reconciled (Isaiah 59:1-2; Romans 5:10), Christ as Lord (Philippians 2:11), the virgin birth (Isaiah 7:14; Luke 1:27), the humanity of Christ (Isaiah 9:6-7; Luke 24:39), the deity of Christ (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23), the resurrection (Matthew 28:7), the humility of Christ (Philippians 2:5-11), and salvation through faith (John 3:3-8; I Peter 1:3).²¹⁰

Indeed, just a quick look through almost any church hymnal will lead the pastor to many different sermon ideas. However, we must always be careful to heed George's warning to compare each hymn's doctrine with the Bible. If we fail to do so, we will preach that Jesus did not cry in the manger or that there were exactly three wise men who visited him in that same manger (instead of an untold number of men who visited the child in a house a few years later), among other much more grievous errors.

Preaching Doctrine from the Lives of Biblical and Historical Characters

John Piper writes that "Christian biography, well chosen, combines all sorts of things pastors need but have so little time to pursue. Good biography is history and guards us against chronological snobbery (as C.S. Lewis calls it). It is also theology - the most powerful kind - because it burst forth from the lives of people like us."²¹¹ God has chosen to reveal Himself through the words of Scripture, which also record His interaction with various individuals through time. Therefore, George is right when he

²¹⁰ Ibid., 85-86.

²¹¹ John Piper, "Brothers, Read Christian Biography," *Desiring God*, January 1, 1995, n.d., http://www.desiringgod.org/esourceLibrary/Articles/ByDate/1995/1562_Brothers_Read_Christian_Biography/ (accessed July 28, 2006).

says that “doctrine has both a propositional and an incarnational dimension.”²¹² As we study the lives of these individuals with whom God dealt, we see truth applied and truth practiced in real time. A study of the life of Joseph or Esther reveals the providence of God. A review of Job’s encounters will teach us about spiritual warfare, in direct defiance with much of what is taught as biblical today. A sermon series on Jonah will present to the listener a look into the heart of God and His amazing mercy. The story of Ruth and her relationship with Boaz provides the opportunity to expound on the role of Christ as our Redeemer.

There are possibilities outside the pages of Scripture as well. The lives of the Church Fathers paint vivid pictures of incarnational theology. These men fought for the truths of Scripture. For instance, Athanasius gave up all to stand firm for the doctrine of the Trinity and the divinity of Christ. As any student of history knows, Athanasius waged his battle over the issue of a single letter – the Greek *iota*²¹³. The debate between Augustine and Pelagius sheds light on the doctrine of original sin. Martin Luther faced excommunication and even death for his stand for the doctrine of justification by faith alone. At the very least, listeners will leave with a new appreciation for the importance of doctrine rightly held. Many in the past have given their lives for fine points of theology that many today cannot be bothered to learn.

²¹² George, *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, 98.

²¹³ Athanasius argued that Christ is *homoousious* (consubstantial) with God the Father (of the very same essence). His Arian counterparts argued that Christ is *homoiousious* with God (of a similar essence).

Preaching Doctrine from Systematic Theology

Systematic theology is “any study that answers the question, ‘What does the whole Bible teach us today?’ about any given topic?”²¹⁴ The phrase “the whole Bible” indicates that systematic theology can be defined further as searching all of Scripture’s relevant passages on any given topic and summarizing the doctrine found therein. This differs from historical theology (which reveals how Christians have understood various doctrines at different time periods), philosophical theology (studying doctrine apart from Scripture by using reason, logic, and the natural world), or biblical theology (studying theological teachings of individual authors and passages of Scripture and the historical development of doctrine as the Bible was written). The difference between systematic theology and biblical theology is not great but a gap exists, nonetheless.

Systematic theology treats biblical passages in a “carefully organized way to guarantee that all important topics receive thorough consideration.”²¹⁵ There are few teachings of Scripture that appear only once in the entire Bible. Most doctrines have a central passage that teaches most clearly that particular doctrine. However, there are almost always other relevant passages that must be considered. To reach a doctrine properly, all of the passages must be considered so that the preacher gives a correct biblical interpretation of the doctrine at hand.

At the same time, certain precautions must be taken into consideration. Walter Kaiser refers to John Bright’s thought that “most biblical passages have within them some facet of theology expressed in such a way that marks them part and parcel of the

²¹⁴ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 21.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 24.

fabric of the whole Bible.”²¹⁶ The foundation for the theology of a certain text is often found in previously written texts as God’s revelation of Himself has unfolded through the millennia. These foundational theological elements are found in the following places:

1. The use of certain terms that have already acquired a special meaning in Scripture, such as “seed,” “rest,” “inheritance,” “sacrifice,” or “Messiah.”
2. The use of direct quotations from writers that precede the text being examined. Paul regularly quotes from the Old Testament, and the expositor must examine the Old Testament context and meaning of these quotations to determine why Paul utilized them as he did.
3. The use of indirect citations or allusions to previous events, persons, or institutions such as the Exodus, the giving of the Law on Sinai, the life and writings of David, and prophetic actions and words.
4. The use of references to the covenants, such as the Abrahamic, Davidic, or New covenants.²¹⁷

Kaiser advises preachers to place most of their attention on previous passages referred to by the current context. The current author is building on what has come before. To utilize material written after the current text is to bring to the text ideas that were not in the mind of the original author. For instance, in studying eschatology, one often refers to Jesus’ words in Matthew 24 or Paul’s words in I Thessalonians 4. It is not necessarily a good idea to read their ideas into an interpretation of the Revelation of Jesus

²¹⁶ John Bright, *The Authority of the Old Testament*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1967), 143, 170; as quoted in Walter C. Kaiser, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 195.

²¹⁷ Kaiser, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, 195.

Christ, which was written by John some decades later. In avoiding this practice, we can be consistent and biblical in our systematic theology.²¹⁸

Ronald Allen lists six reasons why “preaching needs to give systematic theology a high profile today.”²¹⁹ These six reasons were listed in the first chapter. A brief summation will suffice here.

1. Systematic theology in preaching helps appropriately shape Christian community for today. Preaching thusly will help the church to understand what they believe and even why they believe it. Doctrine is definitional and will reveal “why we are Baptists” or “why they are Methodists.” This understanding that will come also helps the church body to see what is essential doctrine and what is non-essential doctrine.
2. Many people today are hungry for the holistic interpretation of life that systematic theology offers. People will not make such a direct statement, but people do want to understand the world in which they live. Only a proper theology will grant that understanding. Allen says that systematic theological sermons “helps the sermon respond to two of the deepest existential human questions: ‘Who are we?’ and ‘What are we to do?’”²²⁰
3. Preaching systematic theology helps the church make sense of diverse theological claims. The world is changing rapidly. Islam is growing around the world, including America. The standard operating procedure of religious people is supposed to be tolerance of all beliefs, which is often incorrectly

²¹⁸ At this point, it must be affirmed that the use of the “analogy of faith” is still a vital part of biblical interpretation because of the coherence and unity of Scripture, the organic nature of Scripture and the canonical closure of Scripture. See Ibid., 196-198 for more.

²¹⁹ Allen, *Preaching is Believing*, 21.

²²⁰ Ibid., 26.

defined to mean acceptance of all beliefs as equally true. Common sense tells us that all religions cannot be true. However, there is possibly even more diversity within the Christian church. Preaching systematic theology will help distill doctrine in our confusing times.

A case in point is the issue in some Baptist churches, most prominently Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, of the necessity of believer's baptism for church membership and admission to the Lord's Table. In an eighty-five page proposed change to the church's constitution, the elders state, "we would not require baptism by immersion as a believer for membership but would teach and pray toward a change of mind that would lead such members eventually to such a baptism."²²¹ This issue was never actually brought to the church for a vote, but this situation reveals the need and benefit of preaching doctrine to a congregation.

4. Preaching out of systematic theology helps pastors and congregations relate to the pluralism of postmodernity. The postmodern mind is based on pluralism (there is no sole exclusive claim to truth) and relativism (beliefs have no absolute reference, only individual and contextual reference). In opposition to this, Christianity makes claims of exclusivity and particularity.
5. Explicit theology in sermons is an antidote for theological illiteracy. Many in the church do not have sufficient knowledge of the central core doctrines of the Bible. As such, they also do not know how to assimilate the teachings of

²²¹ John Piper, Alex Chediah and Tom Steller, "Baptism and Church Membership at Bethlehem Baptist Church: Eight Recommendations for Constitutional Revision," *Desiring God*, August 9, 2005, n.d., http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/TopicIndex/70/1647_Baptism_and_Church_Membership_Eight_Recommendations_for_Constitutional_Revision_PDF/ (accessed July 28, 2006).

the Bible into their lives. Systematic theology will help listeners interpret their world through a theological grid.

6. Systematic theology helps the preacher honor the integrity of elements of the Bible and Christian tradition.

Some aspects of systematic theology could not be preached in a single sermon. Instead, the preacher would want to develop a series to deal with certain topics like the doctrine of the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit or the doctrine of Satan.²²²

Preaching Doctrine from Biblical Theology

Charles Ryrie defines biblical theology as “that aspect of theology which deals systematically with the historically conditioned progress of the revelation of God as found in the Bible.”²²³ God revealed Himself over time. To be sure, the people of the Old Testament knew less of God’s revelation than the people living at the time of the apostles and even us today, who have the complete Scriptures. Therefore, the task of the biblical theologian is to discover what a particular passage of Scripture has to say about a certain topic, all the while realizing that the same topic is discussed elsewhere and perhaps more completely.

Edmund Clowney wrote that “neither exegesis on the one hand, nor systematic theology on the other, can ignore the progressive unfolding of revelation in the history of redemption, and it is the task of biblical theology to study that revelation without losing sight of either its continuity or its progressive and epochal structure.”²²⁴ In his fine little book, Ryrie suggests preaching such series as “What Jesus Believed” to discuss the

²²² See Ryrie, *Practical Guide to Communicating Bible Doctrine*, 24-28 for suggestions.

²²³ Ryrie, *Practical Guide to Communicating Bible Doctrine*, 30

²²⁴ Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1979), 87.

teachings of Christ on a multitude of subjects. A preacher might look at each passage where Jesus spoke evangelistically in order to teach a class on Jesus' methodology of evangelism. Of course, other such possibilities abound as you consider the teachings of Paul, Peter, Moses, David, Solomon, and others.

Regarding these last two sections, Clowney writes that “there is, then, no opposition between biblical theology and systematic or dogmatic theology, though the two are distinct. Systematic theology must draw from the results of biblical theology, and biblical theology must be aware of the broad perspectives of material.”²²⁵ Instead, it appears the difference lies in the methodology of development. The development of systematic theology is topical. The development of biblical theology is exegetical and historical. Clowney quips that this is not “merely systematic theology on the installment plan.”²²⁶ As such, it is not an “either/or” situation but instead is a “both/and” situation. In both cases, the Bible is key. Clowney relates an old Dutch preacher's counsel that “the pulpit must not drive us to the text, but rather the text must drive us to the pulpit.”²²⁷

Preaching Doctrine from Major Biblical Passages

In “Preaching Christian Doctrine,” William J. Carl recalls a preaching class in the 1950s with Professor James Stewart. The class was discussing how to preach doctrinal sermons and referring specifically to I Corinthians 1:22-24. In that passage, Paul wrote that “we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles” (I Corinthians 1:22). Stewart suggested to the class that this text provided an opportunity to preach on the doctrine of the atonement. Carl recalls that one student questioned Stewart of the propriety of preaching the text in that fashion. Stewart responded by saying “I

²²⁵ Ibid., 16.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ J. van Andel, “*Vademecum Pastorale*” (Kampen, 1910), 36, as quoted in *ibid.*, 19.

think probably the best doctrinal sermons are those which arise in an expository fashion out of the text itself.”²²⁸ It is the position of this paper that Stewart was correct.

Carl states that there are three logical starting points for sermons: the text, a doctrine, or an issue.²²⁹ There are shortcomings with two of these starting points. If a pastor begins with a doctrine, it might well be that he is “jumping on his hobby-horse,” or at the least he may give that impression. It does raise suspicions of why certain doctrines are raised at certain times of the year. The pastor will also have more work to do if he begins from this point.²³⁰

A pastor may begin with an issue, whether it is in the national or local news or some event within the church itself. At any point regarding this issue, it is possible that the pastor can be accused of delivering his own opinion or meddling. At the very least, the pastor must wait on some event to occur before the doctrine can be broached. While dealing with the doctrines as they occur naturally in Scripture is a much better approach, there will obviously be times in the life of a local church where certain issues must be addressed as they occur. The pastor must be careful to stay within the bounds of Scripture.

Preaching doctrine from the major passages of Scripture seems almost elementary. Certain key passages treat doctrines in much more detail and volume than anywhere else in Scripture. If a pastor wishes to discuss creation, he will naturally turn to

²²⁸ Carl, *Preaching Christian Doctrine*, 33.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 61-68. The pastor willing to do this extra work may follow Carl’s six steps to preaching with doctrine as the starting point. (1) Determine the biblical basis for this doctrine. Try to settle into one or two primary texts. (2) Examine what major theologians have said about the doctrine. (3) Explore the images and experiences that relate to this doctrine. (4) Examine the issues and problems that relate to this doctrine today. (5) Focus thought in one direction by establishing a central, clear purpose and stay with it. (6) Finally, carefully structure the sermon to reflect allegiance to the started purpose and theology of the doctrine and text.

the first two chapters of Genesis. The fifteenth chapter of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians comes to mind when discussing the resurrection. A sermon on regeneration must discuss the words of Christ to Nicodemus in John 3.

Walter Kaiser tells us that chapters such as those above have been "referred to in church history as *sedes doctrinae*, or 'a seat of doctrine.' These passages, which we may call "chair passages," can well function as boundary setters for interpreters as they seek guidance about the correct interpretation of texts that are textually or topically parallel."²³¹ These "chair passages" contain the most information in one contextual situation on a particular doctrine. While a single passage will seldom tell us everything we need to know about a single doctrine, the chair passage will provide sufficient illumination that the doctrine may be preached.

One benefit of preaching doctrinally in this fashion instead of skipping around the Bible from verse to verse is that the preacher will not be accused of proof-texting. Many preachers have their favorite doctrines or areas of theology. It is too easy for the preacher to manipulate his sermon and almost any passage to speak to that issue, even when proper exegesis does not demand it. Sadly, many pastors "ride their hobby-horses." Preaching doctrine as it arises naturally from the text will hinder the likelihood of this practice.

Another benefit to preaching doctrine from major passages is the amount of effort required of the listener. It would be difficult to preach and more difficult to absorb a sermon that took the time to examine the historical and textual context of every single passage presented in a typical systematic theological sermon. However, by remaining in a single passage of Scripture, the preacher is forced to expound the meaning of that single

²³¹ Kaiser, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, 201.

passage in an expository fashion. If the pastor does his study well, this method also quiets the critic who wants to argue that the preacher is forcing his own ideas on the text.

With the understanding that preaching doctrine from major biblical passages is the most useful and beneficial method of preaching doctrinal sermons, we must now proceed to thinking about how to understand that doctrine and how to incorporate that doctrine into the sermon.

Mining Doctrine

The preacher will try in vain to find doctrine in every single verse of Scripture. Some verses, or even passages, contain no formal doctrine. To be sure, all Scripture is profitable, and application may be found throughout. It is a mistake, however, to force every single verse into one of the major theological categories or subcategories.

Mining Doctrine in Didactic Passages

Typically, one will find doctrine in two places: didactic passages and narrative passages.²³² Didactic passages are found in all kinds of biblical genres. Erickson and Heflin describe six types:

1. A direct statement from God (1 Samuel 3; Jeremiah 1:4; Jonah 1:1; Matthew 3:17; Matthew 17:5).
2. A writer's personal testimony of an experience with God (Isaiah 6:1-5).
3. A sermon given by a spokesman for God (Acts 2).
4. A letter of instruction (the Pauline epistles or letters by John or Peter).
5. A discourse given by Jesus (the Sermon on the Mount or Olivet Discourse).
6. Editorial comments and explanations by a biblical writer (John's prologue).

²³² Erickson and Heflin, *Old Wine in New Wineskins*, 98.

To the preacher, didactic material is the first thought when considering preaching doctrine. Erickson and Heflin write that “Surely, all one needs to do is to determine what the writer or speaker was saying and incorporate this into one’s doctrinal beliefs or declare this in a doctrinal sermon. . . . Certain considerations need to be borne in mind in attempting the transition from Bible to study to sermon.”²³³

First, preachers must remember that the didactic material in the Bible was written to a specific audience in a specific time to deal with a specific situation. Some of the issues were localized to a single congregation and were intended to address a single incident. For instance, Paul wrote many directives to the Corinthian church that seldom find need for application in most modern churches, such as getting drunk at the Lord’s table.

Second, preachers must remember that the didactic material in the Bible was written in a specific cultural setting. We must do our research to determine the context and similarities and differences. Much of the Old Testament will not make much sense when brought directly into the modern world.

Third, preachers must remember that biblical revelation was progressive, unfolding over time. At the same time, there is no contradiction or deviation from the truth. This is why Jesus could say, “You have heard . . . but I say to you”

Fourth, preachers must remember that they and their modern listeners are also culturally and chronologically bound. We all bring our thoughts, biases, and traditions to the text. We often interpret didactic passages through our “glasses,” whether they are Calvinistic or Arminian, Dispensational or Covenantal, Baptist or Presbyterian, or Lutheran or Catholic.

²³³ Ibid., 99-100.

Fifth, Erickson and Heflin say that preachers must differentiate within didactic material what is doctrinal and what is not. They provide the example of Peter's words in I Peter 1:3, which say that "He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." The phrase that speaks of Jesus rising from the dead is a statement of historical fact. The "new birth into a living hope" is a statement that is doctrinal in nature, however undeveloped it is in the passage.

Mining Doctrine in Narrative Passages

The second major body of material from which we can mine doctrine is the vast number of narrative passages in the Bible. God has chosen to reveal Himself to us primarily through the retelling of His intervention in historical events. We instantly think of the Creation, the Exodus, Elijah's battle with the prophets of Baal, and David's many encounters, as well as the events in the life of Jesus from His incarnation to His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. These provide many avenues for doctrinal preaching. Yet, Erickson asks the question correctly: How do we identify, isolate, and extract doctrine from such passages?

Erickson and Heflin provide nine steps to exegeting a passage and mining doctrine from narrative passages.²³⁴ However, the authors admit that the preacher need not always follow in lockstep. First, interpret the passage as accurately as possible, taking the text and culture into account. Second, we should ascertain if any doctrine or doctrines are contained within the passage. This should become a habit to ask of every passage. While looking for doctrine in the passage, determine if God is actively working and what

²³⁴ Ibid., 124-131.

type of relationship He is engaged in with humans. In dealing with the humans in these texts, determine what their actions tell us about the general human condition.²³⁵

Step three requires that the preacher carry step two a little further. Ask very specific and pointed questions about the people in the narrative. Are they believers? Did they live in the time of the Old Testament or New Testament? Were they Jews or Gentiles? Does the individual appear in other narrative passages? In step four, we likewise look closely into the actions or words of God. What do we learn about God in this passage? Fifth, Erickson and Heflin say we must ask about the incident that called for this situation to occur. If God judges someone, we must determine what evil necessitated God's judgment.

Sixth, determine if there are any interpretive or explanatory words given by the biblical writer himself. Sometimes the actions are interpreted for us. Seventh, determine if any interpretive words are given elsewhere in Scripture. This is particularly helpful when the New Testament brings clarity to the Old Testament as God's revelation progressed through time.

Eighth, see if there are any other instances where this doctrine is discussed. We want to preach the whole counsel of God and to be accurate in what we say. It is possible to give a skewed account of some doctrine by preaching a single passage. For instance, the Bible seems to give multiple answers to the question of "What must I do to be saved?" In Acts 16:31, Paul says "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved." In Acts 2:38, Peter proclaims "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of

²³⁵ For a full discussion of his "Fallen Condition Focus, see Bryan Chapell, "Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon," (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 40-44. The "FCF" is "the mutual condition that contemporary believers share with those to or for whom the text was written that requires the grace of the passage" (40-44).

Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sin.” On the other hand, Jesus told one person that he should “obey the commandments” (Matthew 19:17) and later told the same person “Go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven” (Matthew 19:21). These are not three contradictory demands. They supplement one another.

Finally, Erickson and Heflin say we must look for didactic statements about this particular kind of action. A preacher can do this by determining the doctrine presented and by using a concordance or other such tools to find the teaching.

Preaching doctrine from narrative passages offers numerous advantages to the preacher.²³⁶ Narrative passages are in a form ready-made for preaching. Erickson and Heflin say that “while doctrine may not be as easy to identify in this form, it can nonetheless be more easily communicated. It makes the task of doctrinal preaching easier.”²³⁷

Also, a doctrine is more easily accepted if couched in a narrative passage. By retelling the historical event, the listener sees that the doctrine has a very real possibility to be true and is thus important to learn and accept. The doctrine comes already illustrated!

However, there are also inherent difficulties in preaching doctrinal sermons from narrative passages. First, the preacher must determine if the actions and teachings of the narrative are to be considered “descriptive” or “prescriptive.” Can what happened in a particular biblical passage be understood as an absolute truth, or was that event true only

²³⁶ Erickson and Heflin, *Old Wine in New Wineskins*, 119.

²³⁷ Ibid.

for that particular time? For instance, can a preacher teach that one can dip in a muddy river seven times to be healed of a particular disease (2 Kings 5)?

Also, just as we interpret the words in didactic passages, we must interpret the events in narrative passages. When an event occurs, we must determine who the ultimate cause of the event is and whether this causation is direct or indirect.²³⁸ This is especially important when dealing with disaster or calamity in the Bible. Some instances are spelled out nicely for us. In Genesis 50:20, we learn that all the tragedy in Joseph's life was orchestrated directly by God because "God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive." The problem arises when we read certain narratives and incorporate those specific events into our world when dealing with disasters such as the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, or the tsunamis in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, and Thailand in December 2004.

Difficulties are not limited to disasters. Edmund Clowney sadly states that "David's slaying of Goliath has often been preached on in such a way as to be merely 'illustrative' with a vengeance. Indeed, one hears sermons on this theme that might almost as well have been preached on Jack the Giant Killer."²³⁹

Ten Questions to Ask

With these potential difficulties in mind, the pastor will begin his study. As he works through a book of the Bible or attempts to preach on a certain doctrine from a particular biblical text, he must exegete that passage. The certain theological theme or

²³⁸ Ibid., 121

²³⁹ Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*, 82.

doctrine will often appear. If the theological subject is the “big idea” of that particular text, then a theological or doctrinal sermon is in order.²⁴⁰

Once this theological big idea has been uncovered, William Carl says “it is now time to begin answering specific questions that will lead to a doctrinal sermon.”²⁴¹ Listed below are Carl’s ten questions.²⁴²

To show these questions in action, we will use them to examine the text of Romans 8:31-39, which reads:

³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³² He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? ³³ Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; ³⁴ who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

³⁶ Just as it is written,

*"FOR THY SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG;
WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED."*

³⁷ But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.

³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor any other

²⁴⁰ The scope of this paper does not allow a discussion of “big idea” preaching. As stated in Chapter One of this paper, it is assumed that the reader has a basic understanding of expository preaching. Please refer to Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), for a complete treatment of “big idea” preaching.

²⁴¹ Carl, *Preaching Christian Doctrine*, 44.

²⁴² Erickson and Heflin, *Old Wine in New Wineskins*, 102-103. Here they give four steps with multiple substeps in them. These steps will be incorporated into Carl’s questions. They are:

- 1) “Determine the exact meaning and application of the original teaching in that culture and to that audience.” This is done through standard exegetical and interpretational processes using standard tools and resources such as lexicons and commentaries.
- 2) “Assess the place of this particular teaching in the whole of the doctrine. In other words, place the passage in the universal setting by asking if this is the whole of the truth or simply one aspect of the truth of this doctrine.”
- 3) “Isolate the principles that are the underlying permanent or eternal basis of this particular statement. This is the factor that is to be carried over in any recontextualization of the statement.”
- 4) “Finally, place the passage in the setting of the present time and context. This means saying to this particular target group the equivalent of what was being said to that group at that time, or what and how the speaker or writer would have expressed it if addressing our target group.”

created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1. *What doctrines appear in this text?* There are numerous doctrines to examine here. Just a cursory glance reveals teachings on justification (v. 33), eternal security or perseverance of the saints (vv. 35-39), grace (v. 32), condemnation (v., 34), the resurrection, the atonement, the intercession and mediation of Christ, (all in v. 34), angels (v. 38), eschatology (v. 38), the love of God (v. 39).

2. *How do these doctrines fit into the context of this book of the Bible?* Paul is now concluding a major portion of his letter that we have divided into eight chapters. It is important to remember that Paul did not make these divisions. This initial section of his letter opens with an explanation of the Gospel as the method by which God chose to reveal His righteousness. Then Paul explains the fact that humans are by nature unrighteous, whether Jew or Gentile. After this depressing news, Paul proceeds to the good news: God provides His righteousness to us in the death of Jesus Christ, His perfect Son. This righteousness is imputed to us through faith in the work of Christ on the cross.

In this last portion of the first eight chapters, the apostle is telling his readers that we can place our hope in Christ's triumph over Adam's sin and our personal sin and over the power of the Law that can only condemn us for our sin.²⁴³ In all this, Paul's purpose is to teach that the "hope of the Christian, with which Romans 1-8 came to a climax, is wholly dependent on God's faithfulness to His word, His call."²⁴⁴

²⁴³ I am indebted to Dr. Thomas Schreiner, Professor of New Testament Interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky and his outstanding commentary on Romans in the *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* series from Baker Academic. See Thomas Schreiner, "Romans," (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 1998), vii.

²⁴⁴ John Piper, *The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1-23*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 19.

Chapter nine opens a new section with the question “Can the Christian really trust God’s Word when it seems that God’s promises to the Jews have failed?” Chapters 9-12 deal with the absolute trustworthiness of God’s promises and election, thereby making these chapters essential for the securing of the hope addressed in the previous eight chapters.²⁴⁵ The trustworthiness of God Himself as proclaimed in the first eight chapters is key to our understanding of God and to living in His grace. This passage, which functions as an *inclusio* with Romans 5:1-11, provides for the believer the absolute confidence that he can place in God.²⁴⁶

3. *How do these doctrines fit into the context of the whole canon?* The Bible is filled with the promises of God made to certain people or groups of people. His greatest promise is to save forever those who place their trust in Him. Can believers really trust Him to fulfill His promises?

The Bible reveals to us in multiple passages the utter trustworthiness of God to complete the work He has begun. God, before the foundation of the world, set in motion the plan to save individuals from sin by sending His Son as a sacrificial substitute for their certain and necessary punishment. Those who respond to His salvific call (John 6) will be saved as their sins are cast upon Christ. To the individuals for whom Christ is their substitutionary recipient of God’s wrath, God will be his God, and he will be God’s child. Because God is now for the believer (Romans 8:31), the hope of the believer is made certain because no one can possibly oppose us. As Paul explains, no one can successfully accuse the Christian (v. 33); no one can successfully condemn the Christian

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Schreiner, *Romans*, 456.

(v. 34); and no one or no thing can successfully separate us from God's eternal love (vv. 35-39).²⁴⁷

4. *Does the form of Scripture affect our interpretation of these doctrines?* Carl asks this question to deal primarily with the form criticism of Martin Dibelius, K.L. Schmidt, and Rudolf Bultmann. According to Carl, Paul's writing can be classified into four categories: (1) theological assessment; (2) correction and challenge, such as in Corinthians and Galatians; (3) pastoral comfort, such as in Thessalonians; and (4) love letters, such as Philippians. Obviously, Romans would fit into the first category. As such, there is no effect on our interpretation of these doctrines.

There are other "forms" of Scripture to consider. Thomas Long writes of the "relatively simple idea that the literary form and dynamics of a biblical text can and should be important factors in the preacher's navigation of the distance between the text and sermon."²⁴⁸ Long goes on to say that "a psalm is poetry, a miracle story is narrative; and because they are two distinct literary and rhetorical forms, they 'come at' the reader in different ways and create contrasting effects."²⁴⁹

The exegete will still need to ask the typical exegetical questions, such as "Who wrote this?" and "To whom did he write?" Beyond this, the more careful expositor will deal with literary forms and ask even more questions of the text to determine its meaning. Long suggests the following questions be asked and answered:

a) *What is the genre of the text?* The passage from Romans 8 is part of an epistle.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 457.

²⁴⁸ Thomas Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 11.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

- b) *What is the rhetorical function of this genre?* Long writes that there are three primary functions of a typical Greek letter.²⁵⁰ First, a letter will give expression to a friendly relationship between the writer and recipient (*philophronesis*). Second, a letter establishes a presence (*parousia*) to bridge the physical separation between writer and recipient. Third, a letter serves the purpose of engaging the writer and recipient in dialogue (*omilia, dialogos*). All three exist in Paul's letter to the Romans.
- c) *What literary devices does this genre employ to achieve its rhetorical effect?* Paul uses the opening in the first of the letter to identify himself and to address his readers. He offers thanksgiving before entering into the body of the letter, the main section we are addressing in our passage of Romans 8:31-39.
- d) *How in particular does the text under consideration, in its own literary setting, embody the characteristics and dynamics described in questions 1-3?* Paul is writing a dialogical epistle to believers in Rome. The entire body of the letter is linked as Paul repetitively uses connective literary devices such as "for," "therefore," "likewise," and "What then . . .?"²⁵¹ Paul is building argument upon argument to a crescendo in our passage. He is teaching to prove a point.
- e) *Homiletically speaking, How may the sermon, in a new setting (your modern-day setting), say and do what the text says and does?* The modern preacher

²⁵⁰ Heikki Koskeniemi, "Studien zur Idee und Phraseologie des griechischen Brief's bis 400 n. Chr.," (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedekatamie, 1956), as quoted Ibid., 112.

²⁵¹ See 1:16, 18, 20, 21, 26; 2:2, 25; 4:13; 5:6; 6:5; 8:18; 10:5; 12:3; and 15:8 for "for." See 1:24; 2:1; 5:1, 12: 8:1 and 14:13 for "therefore." See 3:1, 9; 4:1; 6: 1, 15; 7:7; 9:14, 30; and 11:7 for "What then . . .?" See 7:4; 8:26, 31 for "likewise."

can then attempt to create, maintain, and deliver a similar argument with sufficient punch to convince the modern-day skeptical believer of the absolute trustworthiness of God. It is usually wise to shape the sermon to fit the shape of the passage.

5. *What is the major theological thrust of this passage?* In this passage, it seems that the major doctrine taught here is that the believer has a certain hope for eternal life because God is for us, and God is trustworthy to uphold His promises.

Ronald Allen asks more questions that might serve the pastor well at this stage. For instance, Allen asks “What are God’s purposes for the community in this test?”²⁵² There are no words (or even letters) in the Bible by mistake. They are all inspired by God and useful to the believer for a multitude of reasons (2 Timothy 3:16). In our passage, God wants us to trust completely in Him and to live with a very certain hope regarding our lives in this age and in the age to come. Allen then asks “What does this text claim regarding the extent and function of divine power in this passage?” This entire passage calls on the reader to trust completely on the power of God to save fully and totally. God and God alone is powerful to save. Finally, Allen asks “What response does this text invite?” Quite simply, Paul invites the reader to trust in God alone for salvation and for a security in that salvation, not because of our ability to keep it but because of the trustworthiness of God.

Al Mohler suggests a further step is in order at this stage of preparation. He writes that “Today’s Christian faces the daunting task of strategizing which Christian doctrines and theological issues are to be given highest priority in terms of our contemporary

²⁵² Allen, *Preaching is Believing*, 54.

context.”²⁵³ We must treat doctrinal issues in terms of their relative importance. All of God’s truth is important but, as someone has said, “some is more important than others.” Mohler suggests that pastors engage in “theological triage.” The word “triage” comes from the French word *trier*, which means “to sort.” A triage officer in a hospital emergency room determines which injuries deserve immediate attention and which injuries are less serious and can wait to be treated. As Mohler says, there is a difference between a gunshot wound and a scraped knee.

In the same way, theological triage requires Christians to determine a scale of theological ranking of urgency or primacy. Mohler suggests three such levels. First-level issues include doctrines that are “most central and essential to the Christian faith. . . . such as the Trinity, the full deity and humanity of Jesus Christ, justification by faith and the authority of Scripture.”²⁵⁴ The early church councils dealt with such issues. Today, these issues appear in an evaluation of cults like Mormonism and growing world religions like Islam and, in places, Roman Catholicism. A denial of these truths amounts to a denial of Christianity itself.

Second-order doctrines are those beliefs that are important; however, “believing Christians may disagree . . . though this disagreement will create significant boundaries between believers.”²⁵⁵ Second-order doctrines are the differences between the Christian denominations such as Baptists, Lutherans, Methodists, Presbyterians, and others. These issues include the mode of baptism, the Lord’s Supper, women in ministry, and others.

²⁵³ Al Mohler, “A Call for Theological Triage and Christian Maturity,” *www.albertmohler.com*, July 12, 2005, n.d., http://albertmohler.com/commentary_print.php?cdate=2005-07-12 (accessed June 15, 2006).

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

Third-order doctrines are those beliefs “over which Christians may disagree and remain in close fellowship, even within local congregations.”²⁵⁶ There is no justifiable cause for division over many eschatological doctrines, such as the timing of the Rapture in relationship with the tribulation and/or the second coming of Jesus Christ (which is a first-order doctrine when considered alone).

The pastor must take these categories into consideration when preaching doctrinal sermons. To preach a sermon on a third-order doctrine and then to demand acceptance is to go beyond the Scriptures. Mohler says that “if the relative urgency of these truths is not taken into account, the debate [or sermon] can quickly become unhelpful.”²⁵⁷ Dr. M. James Sawyer, Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology at Western Seminary writes that the consensus doctrines that are central to the faith “are not the doctrines that evangelicals get upset about when they are challenged. Looking taxonomically, the irony is that the doctrinal discussions that engender the most heat and least light are those doctrines that are historically and exegetically the least well established, but have been raised to touchstone level by particular denominations and traditions in a sectarian fashion.”²⁵⁸ The pastor must be careful to not make this mistake.

6. *Which doctrines in this passage are more directly related to the theological thrust of the passage and which are more peripheral?* All of the doctrines mentioned above are connected to the major doctrinal thrust of the passage. Our hope for eternal life is certain because after giving us His Son, God will surely give us all things. However,

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Ibid. (bracketed material mine). The definition of liberalism is to treat first-order doctrines as though they do not exist or merely third-order in importance. The definition of fundamentalism is the opposite, treating all doctrine as first-order doctrine and demanding strict adherence and unity for fellowship.

²⁵⁸ M. James Sawyer, “Establishing a Doctrinal Taxonomy: A Hierarchy of Doctrinal Commitments,” *Bible.org*, 2000, n.d., http://www.bible.org/page.asp?page_id=181 (accessed July 18, 2006).

the gracious generosity of God is not the big idea of our sermon. Our hope for eternal life is certain because God justifies. However, this is not the passage to use to preach on the doctrine of justification. Our hope for eternal life is certain because Jesus died and was raised again. Yet we dare not preach on the doctrine of the resurrection from this single reference in this passage. Our hope for eternal life is certain because Jesus sits at the right hand of God interceding for us. However, it would not be proper to preach on the intercessory or mediating ministry of Christ from this passage alone.

On the other hand, we can also say that our hope for eternal life is certain because God is for us. Our hope for eternal life is certain because no one can bring a charge against us. Our hope for eternal life is certain because nothing can separate us from the love of God. All of these serve to support the main point of this passage.

7. *What questions would your congregation or culture ask about this passage? Where are the pressure points, the conflict(s)?* Some might ask the following questions: How do we know God is for us? What does it mean that God gave up His son for “us all?” What does it mean when Paul writes that God will graciously give us “all things?” If there is no charge or condemnation, does that give us *carte blanche* to live life anyway that we want? The passage says that nothing can separate us from Christ, but can we willfully separate ourselves? How can the passage say that we are more than conquerors when I always feel so defeated in this life?

This is the second step in Erickson and Heflin’s process. We must put this doctrinal affirmation in perspective by asking if this passage states all we need to know about a particular doctrine. Are the writers trying to answer all our questions?²⁵⁹

²⁵⁹ Erickson and Heflin, *Old Wine in New Wineskins*, 111.

We find the answers to these questions by doing studies of the author's other writings. Even though the Bible is completely unified in its teachings, John writes differently than Paul, who writes unlike Matthew, Mark, or Peter. These various authors are often writing to dissimilar audiences who are comprised of people from differing backgrounds. For this reason, it is good, but not necessary, for the preacher to stay with a certain writer when discussing a doctrine that particular writer brings up.

8. *Which doctrines tend to fit those pressure points best?* In this passage, Paul writes that Christians have a certain hope because God is absolutely trustworthy and we are secure in Christ. These two truths answer many of those questions.

9. *What image is used to bring this doctrine into focus, and what is the modern analogy for this image?* Paul uses images such as the reading of charges in a courtroom setting. Paul speaks of Christ being seated on a throne at the right hand of God. Paul uses natural forces such as tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, and the sword. He goes on to speak of life and death, angels and rulers, heights and depths. Paul is trying to be all-inclusive in his listing of possible items that might separate a believer and God. Possibilities abound to bring in even more all-inclusive boundaries in our modern world.

10. *What structure will you use to preach the doctrine in this passage?* The wise preacher tries to construct his sermon as closely as possible to the form of the passage. Sometimes that is not possible, but, in this instance it is. Paul is concluding a sustained argument and offering his closing comments. The preacher could do the same thing. As stated earlier, three points seem to shine through Paul's argument as he uses a "question and answer" type of format: Who can accuse us? No one can successfully accuse the

Christian (v. 33). Who can condemn us? No one can successfully condemn the Christian (v. 34). Who or what can separate us from the love of God? No one or no thing can successfully separate us from God's eternal love (vv. 35-39).

Universalizing Doctrine

Doctrine and Church Growth

The modern evangelical church is concerned, almost obsessed, with numerical growth. Many individuals have carved a niche in the cottage industry of writing books and conducting surveys to assist churches in attracting and keeping visitors. However, a major flaw in methodology has been made in the process – the common practice of interviewing individuals who are not involved in church or who show no interest in church to determine the direction of the church. These “seekers” answer such questions as “What type of music would you like to hear in church?” and “How long should a typical sermon last?” However, the first order of the worship service should be whether or not all that occurs is pleasing to God. The service is to be focused on and centered around the Lord; instead, it is often focused on satisfying the worldly desires of jaded and often unregenerate potential attenders.

Yet, when the interview is complete, and all the data is assembled, the opinions are then brought back to the church, and the worship services and sermons are changed in an attempt to capture the interest of the bored community. In an article at purposedriven.com, Ron Sylvia, the founding pastor of Church @ The Springs in Ocala, Florida, wrote:

Worship style is as important as theology. Most churches today don't split over theological issues, they split over style issues. It is crucial for the leader to decide what style of worship the church will embrace. Worship style is not simply musical style. The entire worship experience must be

evaluated through the eyes of your target. When you confidently determine who your target is—who you’re trying to reach—it makes crafting a worship experience for that person a lot easier. Through some trial and error you will learn what works and what does not work for your target group.²⁶⁰

The opening statement of that paragraph is stunning because Sylvia goes on to say that “Music is almost more important than theology, because it defines who you are and who you will attract.” It is difficult to imagine one of the apostles making such a statement as the infant church grew in the first century.

Thom Rainer, the president and CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources in Nashville, Tennessee and the founding dean of the Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Church Growth at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, conducted a different type of research. In his book “Surprising Insights from the Unchurched,” he set out to interview a different group of people. Rainer writes that “instead of asking unchurched people, most of whom will not move to the ranks of the church, how we can reach them, we are asking those who have already been reached what happened in their lives.”²⁶¹ Instead of speaking with people who do not attend church or who show no interest in attending church, Rainer interviewed the “formerly unchurched,” those who “[had] not been in church, except sporadically, for at least ten years (most for a lifetime) but [have] recently become active in a church. All of the formerly unchurched have also recently become Christians, not merely church

²⁶⁰ Ron Sylvia, “Determining Your Worship Style,” *Purpose Driven*, 2006, n.d., <http://www.purposedriven.com/en-US/WorshipCommunity/ChurchPlanting/plantingapril.htm> (accessed July 24, 2006).

²⁶¹ Thom Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 128.

attenders.”²⁶² Rainer and his team interviewed 353 such individuals, and the results are fairly shocking.

The first question asked of these new Christians and church members was “What factors led you to choose this church?” This question was asked and answered without any prompting from the survey team.²⁶³ Gaining the number one spot on the list of answers with ninety percent agreement was “pastor/preaching.”²⁶⁴ Issues relating to the personality and style of the pastor and his preaching are paramount. In a very direct fashion, the formerly unchurched were asked “Did the pastor and his preaching play a part in your coming to the church?” Almost all the responders answered “yes” to this question (97% with another 1% answering “uncertain”). Only 2% said “no.”

The survey team dug a little deeper. They asked the responders to list the factors relating to pastors that influenced them the most, leading them to attend their particular church. The answers are given below:

1. Preaching that teaches (211 of 353 responders)
2. Preaching that applies to my life (147)
3. Authenticity of the preacher (121)
4. Pastor’s conviction (120)
5. Personal contact by Pastor (105)
6. Pastor is a good communicator (89)
7. Pastor is a leader (88)
8. Pastor’s class (87)

²⁶² Ibid., 19.

²⁶³ Ibid., 46.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 21.

The responses are surprising. To Sylvia and others, the most likely influence would be music and worship styles. However, that answer only found enough support to be ranked twelfth out of the thirteen answers given. The option of “worship style/music” was given on only eleven percent of the questionnaires – just above “location” (7%) and behind “other groups/ministries” (12%). It appears that the great debate over worship style truly is an intramural skirmish about which those outside the walls of the church show little interest.²⁶⁵

Instead, the second most popular answer with an 88% agreement was “doctrine.” Rainer writes that “although we stereotype the unchurched as totally ignorant of biblical teachings, such an assumption is not always valid. Many of the formerly unchurched in our study did know basic doctrinal issues before they became Christians, and they were attracted to a church that held strong convictions about biblical matters.”²⁶⁶ In interviews with a similar group Rainer calls the “transfer churched,” the results are similar. Of these individuals who recently left one church to attend another, 89% answered affirmatively the question “Were the beliefs of the church important in your decision to come to your church?”²⁶⁷

One individual, named “Susan M” for anonymity, responded contrary to a common myth that some pastors have elevated to dogma: “We must be careful in our teaching and preaching so that we do not communicate deep and complex biblical truths that will confuse the unchurched.”²⁶⁸ Susan, a new Christian, said, “What really frustrated me was that I had a deep desire to understand the Bible, to hear in-depth

²⁶⁵ Another superficial factor that some churches overemphasize include the name of the church, about which 81% of those polled said had no influence in their decisions.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 22.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 25.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 45.

preaching and teaching, but most of the preaching was so watered-down that it was insulting to my intelligence.”²⁶⁹

Another responder, Jennifer K from Minnesota, had an interesting insight. She wrote “I have watched CNBC [a business cable network] for years since I follow my investments closely. I remember the first time I watched the program. They used a language that contained some strange phrases, like stock splits, P/E ratio and NASDAQ. Sometimes they explained them, and other times I had to go to the dictionary or the Internet to learn, but I enjoyed the experience.”²⁷⁰ The pastor should not be fearful of using theological words in his sermon. To be sure, he should define new terms and phrases, but most listeners are eager to learn.

The church growth movement would be revolutionized if churches would consider the teaching and preaching of doctrine to be a major issue in reaching their communities. The research of George Barna, one of the major players in the church growth movement, corroborates Rainer’s findings. Barna, however, interviewed the unchurched – those still not attending or even showing an interest in attending church. In his study entitled “What People Say They Want from a Church,” the primary issue for these individuals is once again “theological beliefs or doctrine.”²⁷¹ So, according to research conducted with both groups of people, one of the most important and critical issues in reaching people is the preaching and teaching of doctrine in the church by the pastor.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ George Barna, “What People Say They Want From A Church,” *The Barna Report*, April-June 1999, 10-11, as quoted in *ibid.*, 129.

Indeed, Rainer states that the formerly unchurched “were not just interested in the facts of the doctrine; they were insistent that the churches should be uncompromising in their stand.”²⁷² Individuals who have been regenerated by God now desire more than an entertaining hour of popular music. They want to know the truth. As Jorge C. said pointedly, “I visited a few churches before I became a Christian. Man, some of them made me want to vomit. They didn’t show any more conviction about their beliefs than I did. And I was lost and going to hell.”²⁷³

Making Doctrine Understandable

There can be no doubt that doctrine is vital to the health of the church and even to the growth of the church. However, there is some difficulty in expressing that doctrine in a way that makes sense to the person in the pew. It is acceptable to use theological jargon, but that jargon must be explained and defined to a congregation that did not attend seminary. Erickson and Heflin write that we must put forth the effort to “[retain] the basic meaning of the biblical teaching, not omitting, adding to, or distorting any part of it, but expressing it in a fashion that is understandable to people today.”²⁷⁴

This “universalization” of doctrine is accomplished by the correct use of hermeneutics. Indeed, there are incorrect ways of interpreting the Scripture. For instance, some pastors unwisely take a biblical passage and proceed directly to the modern world with the same terminology and application as the first-century world. If this were done, pastors would encourage congregants to purchase swords (Luke 22:36), abstain from eating catfish (Leviticus 11:9-10), avoid wearing jewelry (1 Peter 3:3), or sell everything to adequately follow Christ (Luke 12:33). It must be admitted that if this hermeneutic

²⁷² Ibid., 127.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Erickson and Heflin, *Old Wine in New Wineskins*, 133.

were followed absolutely, the evangelical world would be populated by half-blind Christians with no hands (Matthew 5:29-30).

Other pastors might go to the other extreme and suggest that there is no direct correlation between the biblical world and our world, and therefore the church today does not need to adhere to such ancient standards. Obviously, this liberal hermeneutic is helpless to affect any change in people's lives.

Erickson and Heflin describe an intermediate method to finding the meaning of a specific teaching or doctrine in a particular passage. It is a three-step process. First, the pastor must determine the meaning to the ancient reader. Then, the pastor must abstract the permanent essence of that meaning. Finally, the pastor must make a contemporary application of that truth that mirrors the application being made in the biblical passage.²⁷⁵

The final step of "mirroring" the biblical perspective is vital. Many theological errors have been made when the pastor is not careful to retain the whole message and only the message of the passage without offering any private interpretation that cannot be considered integral to the biblical revelation.²⁷⁶ A current example is the furor over N.T. Wright's *New Perspective on Paul* (NPP). In Wright's seminal book, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, he writes,

Judaism in Paul's day was not, as has regularly been supposed, a religion of legalistic works-righteousness. If we imagine that it was, and that Paul was attacking it as if it was, we will do great violence to it and to him. Most Protestant exegetes had read Paul and Judaism as if Judaism was a form of the old heresy Pelagianism, according to which humans must pull themselves up by their moral bootstraps and thereby earn justification, righteousness, and salvation. No, said Sanders. *Keeping the law within Judaism always functioned within a covenantal scheme*. God took the initiative, when he made a covenant with Judaism; God's grace thus precedes everything that people (specifically, Jews) do in response. The

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 134.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 135.

Jew keeps the law out of gratitude, as the proper response to grace—not, in other words, in order to *get* into the covenant people, but to *stay* in. Being “in” in the first place was God’s gift. This scheme Sanders famously labeled as “covenantal nomism” (from the Greek *nomos*, law). Keeping the Jewish law was the human response to God’s covenantal initiative.²⁷⁷

Much has been written to buttress Wright’s controversial position, and even more has been written to oppose it. Regardless of the side one takes, it appears that Wright’s position downplays the necessity for the biblical doctrine of the imputation of God’s righteousness and the justification of individual sinners. There are other concerns pertinent to this paper.²⁷⁸ First, the NPP position states that the traditional Christian interpretation of Paul and his teachings on justification are contextually incorrect. Evangelical protestant exegetes are accused of misunderstanding what Paul was

²⁷⁷ N.T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 18-19 (italics mine). Wright further explains his position anecdotally: “In my early days of research, before Sanders had published *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* in 1977 and long before Dunn coined the phrase ‘The New Perspective on Paul’, I was puzzled by one exegetical issue in particular, which I here oversimplify for the sake of summary. If I read Paul in the then standard Lutheran way, Galatians made plenty of sense, but I had to fudge (as I could see dozens of writers fudging) the positive statements about the Law in Romans. If I read Paul in the Reformed way of which, for me, Charles Cranfield remains the supreme exegetical exemplar, Romans made a lot of sense, but I had to fudge (as I could see Cranfield fudging) the negative statements about the Law in Galatians. For me then and now, if I had to choose between Luther and Calvin I would always take Calvin, whether on the Law or (for that matter) the Eucharist. But as I struggled this way and that with the Greek text of Romans and Galatians, it dawned on me, I think in 1976, that a different solution was possible. In Romans 10.3 Paul, writing about his fellow Jews, declares that they are ignorant of the righteousness of God, and are seeking to establish ‘their own righteousness’. The wider context, not least 9.30–33, deals with the respective positions of Jews and Gentiles within God’s purposes – and with a lot more besides, of course, but not least that. Supposing, I thought, Paul meant ‘seeking to establish their own righteousness’, not in the sense of a moral status based on the performance of Torah and the consequent accumulation of a treasury of merit, but an ethnic status based on the possession of Torah as the sign of automatic covenant membership? I saw at once that this would make excellent sense of Romans 9 and 10, and would enable the positive statements about the Law throughout Romans to be given full weight while making it clear that this kind of use of Torah, as an ethnic talisman, was an abuse. I sat up in bed that night reading through Galatians and saw that at point after point this way of looking at Paul would make much better sense of Galatians, too, than either the standard post-Luther readings or the attempted Reformed ones.” N.T. Wright, “New Perspectives on Paul,” *ntwrightpage.com*, (paper presented at 10th Edinburgh Dogmatics Conference, Rutherford House, Edinburgh), 25-28 August 2003, n.d., http://www.ntwrightpage.com/Wright_New_Perspectives.htm (accessed July 24, 2006).

²⁷⁸ J. Ligon Duncan, “The Attractions of the New Perspective(s) on Paul,” *Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals*, (paper presented at Presbyterian Church in America Convocation on Reformation and Revival, Jackson, MS), October 2001, n.d., http://www.alliancenet.org/partner/Article_Display_Page/0,,PTID307086%7CCCHID560462%7CCIID1660662,00.html (accessed July 24, 2006).

responding to in his letters to the churches of Galatia and Rome. The NPP proponents say that because most of Christianity misunderstood the problem Paul addressed (legalistic Judaism), we have therefore misunderstood Paul's solution to that problem.

Consequently, even though the entire Reformation hinged on the doctrine of justification, in Wright's opinion the Protestant church has basically been wrong on justification since the time of the Reformers. Second, there is concern on the exegetical level. Advocates claim that the church has incorrectly understood the meaning of "righteous" and "justified" as used by Paul. A staggering amount of exegesis is offered to support this opinion. However, the searcher will be hard pressed to find any standard lexicon that defines the Greek word for "righteousness" as "membership within a group," or "justify" as "to make or declare the member of a group."²⁷⁹ Finally, a readiness to revise and reassess historical theology is a cause for concern.

The question at the heart of this issue is whether or not Wright, Dunn, Sanders, et. al., have retained the whole message and only the message of the Bible without offering any private interpretation. It is possible, yet difficult to conceive, that all of orthodox Protestantism has been wrong for so long. It is also easy to see how failure to follow the third step can bring severe results.

Decontextualizing Ourselves

Erickson and Heflin say that we must make a contemporary interpretation and application of the doctrine that mirrors the ancient interpretation and application. This is not easily done. We all have biases and traditions and too often read our Bibles through certain theological grids, forcing "round" passages into "square" interpretations. The duo

²⁷⁹ Chuck Hill, "N.T. Wright and Justification," *IIM Magazine Online*, 3:22 (May 28 to June 2, 2001), n.d., <http://www.thirdmill.org/files/english/html/nt/NT.h.Hill.Wright.html> (accessed July 24, 2006).

suggests that the pastor debate the doctrine from all sides of the discussion. They suggest that doing so will reduce our tendency to dogmatize. The highest result is that the pastor is forced to look at the other positions.

As noted earlier (see page 132), I recently taught a course on eschatology. The class showed considerable interest in the idea of a Rapture. Therefore, in the subsequent class, I taught a ten-week course on the Rapture. In this class, I tried my best to present a positive case for each of the four main positions held today: Pretribulation Rapture, Midtribulation Rapture, Posttribulation Rapture and Pre-Wrath Rapture. I was forced to research each position honestly and was surprised to find that the position I once blindly held was not as solid as I had always assumed. By the end of the class, I had been persuaded by my research to change a major tenet of my eschatology.

This mental debate will force pastors to examine their own presuppositions and traditions. Doing so will help increase the likelihood that the doctrines they preach are the doctrines of the Bible and not those of a particular theological heritage independent of Scripture.

Decontextualizing Biblical Statements

Erickson and Heflin state that the doctrinal preacher must also understand that “the original writings were themselves already contextualizations.” The writers say that the pastor must ask more questions. What local factors caused the writer to write what he wrote? Was there a particular heresy he had to combat? Understanding the Gnostic and Docetic influences of the first century sheds light on the writings of epistles of John and Paul (particularly in Colossians).

Awareness of the respective audiences also reveals a way of understanding doctrines. For instance, we know that Matthew wrote to a predominantly Jewish audience. This gives us insight when studying such doctrines as the kingdom.

To decontextualize biblical statements is also to study the unique emphases of the different writers when they deal with the same doctrine. An obvious example is the role of faith and works in salvation in the writings of Paul and James. Paul often focused on aspects of soteriology, depending on his audience and its need for understanding. Once the pastor sees the differences, it helps him to find the common elements.

Erickson and Heflin further say that the role of the doctrinal preacher is to determine the essence of a doctrine, which is to distill the doctrine to its purest and simplest form.²⁸⁰ Even though doctrinal truths are often inferred in singular places and can only be fleshed out by reading multiple passages of Scripture, we also believe that the Bible is unified and therefore that doctrine is constant. However, doctrine is progressive and consequently described more specifically in the later stages of revelation. The authors give the doctrine of salvation as an example.

Another way to determine the essence of the doctrine is to look across cultures in the Bible for common features. The Bible deals with multiple cultures in its narratives, letters, and gospels. If Paul taught the same thing to both Jews and Greeks, the pastor can be sure the doctrine is simple. In other places, such as the ecclesiastical role of elders and/or deacons, the doctrine is not so clear.

Erickson and Heflin give a third method to determine the essence of a doctrine: look for supporting reasons offered for the doctrine being taught. Sometimes the doctrine is taught for transient reasons. At other times, the teaching of the doctrine is rooted in a

²⁸⁰ Erickson and Heflin, *Old Wine in New Wineskins*, 140.

permanent matter such as the person of God, creation, or the cross. This is often a difficult skill to develop and can lead to various degrees of understanding and acceptance. For instance, Paul declares that women are not to speak in a public worship service. Is this teaching present because of a particular problem in the Corinthian church, or is it a problem that Paul sees everywhere?

A fourth and final method of determining the essence of a doctrine given by Erickson and Heflin suggests that the doctrinal preacher determine if the doctrine is given in a universal or localized setting. Jesus commanded that His disciples are to go out into the world and baptize more disciples. This is a universal doctrine, as seen by Christ's promise to be with those baptizing disciples to the end of the age. Yet, Christ also dealt locally with His disciples. Jesus privately washed their feet. Jesus neither did this for anyone else nor commanded it be done. Therefore, footwashing, though biblical and still a possibility for the modern church, is not mandatory.

Particularizing Doctrine

Translators of Scripture have always had a problem: getting the meaning of a word or phrase across to a different culture without sacrificing the content. Many people believe that a translator must merely choose words from the new culture that correlate with the words of the language to be translated. This is possible in some instances, but in most cases, a word-for-word translation is not feasible. To be so strictly literal would result in an indecipherable mess.

Some foreign phrases are not able to be transliterated into the English language. The French have the saying *j'ai le cafard*. The most literal translation is "I have the cockroach." This makes no sense to a person speaking English until he discover this

means “I am depressed.” It is the equivalent to the American phrase “I am blue,” equally confusing to a non-English speaking person. The French also have a saying that is literally translated as “to have mustard up the nose.” This makes no sense until one considers our equally confusing expression, “to be hot under the collar.” Other such idioms as “It’s raining cats and dogs,” “I have a frog in my throat,” and “That will open up a can of worms” run the risk of this confusion in translation. There are also biblical idioms that defy literal translation. The Bible tells us that David “slept with his fathers,” yet we know that this phrase means that he died (1 Kings 2:10).

We can easily see the problem with a literal translation of words and phrases. However, the same problem occurs with doctrine in certain places. Doctrine is often couched in terms that originate in a different culture and much different language than our own. As mentioned earlier, the Bible was written by authors with an Eastern mindset. God was described as a “Rock” or a “Fortress” or “flowing water.” Readers in the West must work to decipher these images. Walter Kaiser says that “the Achilles’ heel for many among the trained clergy is the failure to bring the Biblical text from its B.C. or first-century A.D. context and to relate it directly and legitimately to the present day.”²⁸¹ Indeed, to stop with only a description of the grammatical, syntactical, historical, and literary unit and go no further is “like carrying the football to within twenty-five yards of the end zone and then asking God’s people to carry the ball the rest of the way – perhaps with a wave of the hand and a passing allusion to the wonderful ministry of the Holy Spirit in each believer’s life.”²⁸²

²⁸¹ Walter Kaiser, *Toward An Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1981), 131.

²⁸² Ibid., 132.

Exegeting Our Culture

The Bible was written during an agrarian age, and agrarian terminology is used throughout. Jesus is referred to as a shepherd, and believers are called sheep. What does it mean when Jesus leaves the ninety-nine to go after the one lost sheep? What does it mean when Jesus talks about His sheep that hear His voice as opposed to those who do not hear His voice? The Christian life is said to be evidenced by the production of fruit. What does it take to grow fruit in the natural world? Does the process carry over completely or only partially? The end of the world is said to be a harvest. What are the conditions at the time of a harvest? What type of work is done? Who does the work, and what characteristics do the harvestable products contain? These metaphors made sense to the original audience and even to English audiences just a few decades ago. Now, some of the power – and perhaps some of the meaning – behind these words is lost on the modern audience.

Just as we discussed decontextualizing doctrine from specific situations in the last section, we now must discuss recontextualizing that same doctrine into the specific situation of our world and time. Erickson and Heflin say this process involves three steps, each of which involves three dimensions.²⁸³

The first step deals with “length.” This step simply means to bring the truth from the past to the present. Much of this work is done in the typical exegetical and hermeneutical stages common to good expository preaching.

The second step is “width,” the area of exegeting the culture and moving freely from one culture to another. This is a difficult practice, and it has only become more complex as our world continues to splinter into smaller and smaller groups and sub-groups. If a pastor is in an inner-city church whose congregation is a “melting pot” of

²⁸³ Erickson and Heflin, *Old Wine in New Wineskins*, 149.

nationalities and cultures, he will have to preach doctrine differently than the preacher of a small country church in the Appalachian mountains.

The third step concerns “height,” by which the authors mean the adjustment needed to accommodate different levels of understanding and intelligence. In this step, the doctrinal preacher must take into consideration the intelligence, background, education level, the knowledge of Scripture, denominational heritage, and traditional predilections of his audience as he “translates” the doctrine for them. Today’s preacher must be able to explain a doctrinal concept at several different levels. Just as the biblical writers chose agrarian symbols to relate their teaching to their audience, the modern preacher must choose images and symbols of the modern age.

Biblical examples abound for such symbolization. The biblical authors wrote of the atonement using words related to the buying (redeeming) of slaves in order to set them free. John referred to the Old Testament image of the mercy seat to speak of propitiation. The writer of Hebrews referred to the mysterious Melchizedek to inform his readers of Jesus’ role of a superior High Priest. Paul speaks often of a trumpet that will blow on the Day of the Lord, an image that brings to mind the use of the trumpet in various Hebrew feast celebrations.

Each of these uses would bring vivid mental images to the ancient mind. Doctrinal preachers today would serve their congregations well to do the same thing. Our culture is decidedly visual, and preachers should appeal to that mode of understanding, not completely, but at least in part. Instead of speaking of the redemption of a slave, the pastor could talk of the redemption of another type of debt – personal consumer debt. Almost everyone in the audience will have an understanding of the weight of debt and the

freedom of having that debt eliminated by another. The question that must be asked and answered to be an effective doctrinal preacher is this: “If Paul (or Jesus, or Peter, etc.) were saying this here and now, or writing this to us, how would he say it?”²⁸⁴

Truly Relevant Doctrine

Grenz and Olson say a truly relevant theology will embody three elements.²⁸⁵

First, theology must be articulated in a manner that people can understand. We must “borrow” the *lingua franca* if we are to take seriously our task as theological preachers. The authors give an interesting sidebar to illustrate this issue. Olson made this point, and one gentleman stood to object, saying, “All we need to do is to proclaim the message of the Lamb of God like the early disciples did.”²⁸⁶ Olson admits that the objector is correct if he is dealing purely with intent. However, if he is speaking of content, he is wrong. A practical experiment would bear this out: stand on a street corner and proclaim The Baptist’s words “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” The imagery will not make much sense to passersby.

Second, a relevant theology will speak to the problems, longings, and ethos of a contemporary culture.²⁸⁷ Grenz and Olson say there are two starting points for this task: start with the Bible or start with culture. We immediately say that to be a good theologian and a good expositor, we must start with the Bible. However, this method presents a certain problem. Reading the Bible reveals to us the questions the Bible raises. In our quest to read and to be faithful to the Bible, we run the risk of overlooking our culture

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 157.

²⁸⁵ Grenz and Olson, *Who Needs Theology?*, 98.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 99.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 100.

and failing to deal with the questions our people are asking today.²⁸⁸ To use the same example of teaching on the doctrinal image of the “lamb of God,” the preacher would be answering the question “Where can I find the perfect sacrifice for sin?” No one is asking that question today. However, many are asking other questions related to sin and its removal and our possible victory over its power.²⁸⁹

Jesus taught this way. He dealt differently with people who came into contact with Him from various worlds. He told the rich young ruler one thing, Nicodemus another, and the woman at the well yet another. He did not have a single “witnessing plan” for every occasion. He looked around him and took images from the hillside (birds of the air and grass of the fields), the seashore (fishers of men), and the fields (harvesting). Jesus was masterful at contextualizing his message.

Third, a relevant theology will take seriously contemporary discoveries and insights of the various academic disciplines.²⁹⁰ As many have said before, if all truth is God’s truth, then there is truth that is not found within the pages of Scripture. We cannot make the same mistake of the mid-1500s when the church refused to acknowledge the Copernican revolution of the heliocentricity of our solar system. Some preachers rebel against the very idea, thinking that to do so is to subjugate the Bible and theology to a secular way of thinking. Yet we must realize, as Grenz and Olson tell us, that we cannot “find some supposedly culture-free realm in which only the ‘language of Zion’ – the pure, untainted discourse of heaven – is spoken. In the end, Zion’s language is the

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 110.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 100.

language of the day because the Word of God always comes to expression through human categories.”²⁹¹

We must bring these thoughts together in order to “set forth the unity and coherence of the biblical teaching about God, ourselves and the world in the context God calls us to be disciples.”²⁹² So, we must understand the Bible, ourselves, and the world in which we live to help bring understanding to our listeners. This seems difficult and almost impossible to bring all these together – sort of like trying to add $1/2 + 1/3 + 1/10 + 1/15$ together.²⁹³ The problem appears to be unsolvable until one discovers a common denominator. When you do that, the problem becomes $15/30 + 10/30 + 3/30 + 2/30$, the sum of which equals $30/30$ or 1. It is in this way of looking at theology that allowed theologians to discern with the Doctrine of the Trinity. The Bible nowhere explicitly teaches Trinitarian doctrine, yet it is a first-order, essential doctrine. By answering “How can God be both ‘one’ and ‘three’ at the same time?” theologians made sense of the Bible’s teaching that God is not “one” in the same way that He is “three.”²⁹⁴ To make this idea palatable, the theologians of the third and fourth centuries “borrowed” from the understanding of their day, using Latin categories such as “one *substantia*” (substance) and “three *personae*” (persons). Later, the Greeks spoke of this “math problem” as “one *ousia*” (essence) and “three *hypostaseis*” (centers of consciousness).²⁹⁵ This is obviously non-biblical language, but it is now our Christian language. This is pure

²⁹¹ Ibid., 101.

²⁹² Ibid., 104. Grenz and Olson call this the theologian’s constructive task.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 106.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

contextualization, struggling to “understand the scriptural witness to God in a manner that made sense in their world.”²⁹⁶

In the same way, the doctrinal preacher must find a common denominator between the words of the ancient world, the customs, culture, and understandings of the modern world, and then create new images to convey meaning. This understanding forces Grenz and Olson to make a radical statement: “While necessarily biblical, theology is never the product of Scripture alone. The goal of theological construction is not merely to say *what* the Bible says. Rather, our task is to construct biblical truth in a specific context.”²⁹⁷ In other words, a pastor is not to take statements from Moses, Jeremiah, John, and Paul and bring them directly to the modern world. Instead, the preacher will seek to understand the message of God in the modern context.

To conclude this section of preparing a doctrinal sermon, the summary of principles given by Walter C. Kaiser is most appropriate and timely. In his classic work *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*, Kaiser, co-writing with Moises Silva, lists the following reminders for preparing doctrinal sermons:²⁹⁸

- 1) *The main burden of doctrinal teaching must rest on the chair passages.* This principle has been discussed earlier in the chapter.
- 2) *Exegesis is prior to any system of theology.* The Bible is not a theological textbook. Yet the human tendency is to categorize, organize, and systematize its teachings. We must always be vigilant to ensure that our theology comes from the Scriptures and not through our systemic grid. The preacher must be sure to make his system fit the Bible, not the other way around.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 107.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 108.

²⁹⁸ Kaiser and Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, 202-206.

- 3) *Doctrines must not go beyond scriptural evidence.* It is a temptation to turn to logical conclusions when studying doctrine. This often leads to serious problems such as Open Theism and Hyper-Calvinism.
- 4) *The analogy of Scripture must take priority over the analogy of faith.* The analogy of Scripture is the act of letting Scripture interpret Scripture. This concept “comes into play in the interpretive process *after* one has established the meaning of a particular passage from its immediate context. Since the analogy of faith scans the entirety of Scripture without concerning itself with sequence, it is best to use it only by way of summary at the conclusion of investigating each paragraph or basic unit of exegetical work.”²⁹⁹ Priority must be given to exegesis and the earlier revelation of God in Scripture. We must “read the Bible forward in time. . . . The order of employing the analogy of (antecedent) Scripture first and then using the analogy of faith in the summary of each of the main points of a sermon is of primary importance.”
- 5) *Only what is directly taught in Scripture is binding on the conscience.*
- Discerning Christians detest the mishandling of Scripture by the cults. We should feel the same when human interpretations are elevated to the level of Scripture.
- 6) *No doctrine should be based on a single passage of Scripture, a parable, an allegory, a type, or an uncertain textual reading.*
- 7) *Theological interpretation must recognize its responsibility to the church.*

Today’s theologians and pastors must remember that we stand on the

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 194. See 193-201 for a full discussion of these two issues. See also Kaiser, *Toward An Exegetical Theology*, 134-140.

shoulders of those who came before us. We must recognize that interpretation belongs to the church while at the same time being certain that our traditions are based on the Bible and not private interpretation. Students of Scripture often go to two extremes in this instance. Some repudiate all prior study and believe that they can glean as much from the Scriptures on their own without the benefit of the godly men and women who came before us. Others make the opposite error and put more trust in a particular theologian or group of thinkers than they do in the Scriptures themselves. Both are incorrect methodologies. A doctrinal preacher must have balance in this issue.

The Doctrinal Sermon

After the difficult work in the study, the pastor must make his way to the pulpit. The art and science of preaching has been ably explained elsewhere, and the preaching of expository messages is beyond the scope of this paper. With this in mind, the reader is once again directed to such trusted sources as Haddon Robinson's *Biblical Preaching* and Bryan Chapell's *Christ-Centered Preaching*.

However, there are some aspects of preaching a doctrinal sermon that must be considered. Most believe that a doctrinal sermon is a topical sermon. However, it may be preached expositively. Erickson and Heflin tell us that this expository doctrinal sermon "explains and clarifies a portion of Scripture (the sermon text), the truth of which has been discovered through careful study, with a view to making appropriate application of the truth to those who listen."³⁰⁰ They go further in their explanation, which is most helpful for the doctrinal preacher who remembers that increased knowledge is not the

³⁰⁰ Erickson and Heflin, *Old Wine in New Wineskins*, 170.

lone desired result. The authors say that “the sermon needs more than explanation, which is largely oriented in the past. The preacher should tell the listeners how the hearing of the sermon will make a difference in their lives. This is application, a requirement for good expository preaching.”³⁰¹

As Haddon Robinson has repeated numerous times in class lectures, there are no such things as sermon forms. Instead, there are forms that sermons take. However, with the purpose of the sermon being didactic, the sermon is usually, though not necessarily, developed deductively.³⁰² In a deductive sermon, the theme or “big idea” of the message is presented to the audience early in the discourse and developed from that point. Pastors can preach expository-textual sermons or expository-passage sermons or expository-thematic (topical) sermons.³⁰³ In each, pastors may use a book, a chapter, a paragraph, a sentence, or perhaps even a word as the theme of the sermon.

Expository-Textual Sermons

Pastors must not be restricted to preaching any sermon, much less a doctrinal sermon, in a particular form. Some may argue that pastors must preach consecutively through the books of the Bible. However, in doing so, preachers will touch on doctrines only in an incidental fashion as those doctrines happen to appear in the text.³⁰⁴ There is doctrine to be found in all the books of the Bible, but quite obviously some doctrines are more vital than others. Some pastors may choose certain books specifically for their doctrinal content, and others may continually pass over those same books to avoid dealing with certain doctrines. For this reason, Erickson and Heflin suggest that doctrinal

³⁰¹ Ibid., 170-171.

³⁰² Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmann’s Publishing Company, 1988), 144.

³⁰³ Ibid., 171.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 170.

sermons be preached “by design and not leave the impression that doctrine is incidental.”³⁰⁵

Preachers may preach from a shorter passage, perhaps only a verse or two in length. The only limiting factor in the selection of a passage or a verse is that a complete unit of thought must be presented. Many doctrines are presented in such fashion and contain complete units of thought:

- John 3:16 - For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.
- Galatians 2:20 - I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.
- Romans 8:29-30 - For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.
- Ephesians 2:8-9 - For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast.
- Hebrews 13:5-6 - Let your character be free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU," so that we

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

confidently say, "THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID.
WHAT SHALL MAN DO TO ME?"

- Romans 1:16-17 - For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."
- The Beatitudes can be dealt with individually.

Jesus presented several parables in a single sentence:

- Matthew 13:33 - He spoke another parable to them, "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three pecks of meal, until it was all leavened."
- Matthew 13:44 – "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field."
- Matthew 13:45-46 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it."
- Matthew 13:47-48 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea, and gathering fish of every kind; and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down, and gathered the good fish into containers, but the bad they threw away."

While preaching through a book of the Bible, the passages above and others like them can and should be singled out for their doctrine in that sermon series. Erickson and

Heflin list the advantages for such a tactic. First, the brevity of the verses will definitely aid the listener in retention and application. Also, the conciseness of the passage will allow the pastor to focus his energies on a smaller unit of thought. This will greatly aid the pastor in his week-to-week preaching study as he concentrates his study hours in a smaller frame. Further, the form these short passages take will usually carry over directly to the sermon form. The structure for the sermon is already determined by the structure of the passage.

A serious disadvantage to using this approach apart from the passage occurring in a systematic book survey is that some may begin to think of the Bible as a collection of acontextual sentences. Context can easily be lost in dealing with a few short sentences in isolation. For this reason, the pastor must be very careful to set the verse and the doctrine in the correct context.

Expository-Passage Sermons

Some doctrinal sermons will utilize a longer section of Scripture. For example, John 3:1-21 details a wonderful treatment of regeneration as Jesus explains salvation to Nicodemus. In John 6, Jesus delivers a long discourse on why some people do not come to faith in Christ.

In some longer passages, it becomes difficult to make a particular doctrine the central theme. Erickson and Heflin use Exodus 3 (the call of Moses) as an example. In Exodus 3:1-22, three doctrines spring forth: Revelation (God reveals Himself to Moses to go to Pharaoh), Providence, and God. If the pastor concludes with verse 9, the doctrine to preach is Revelation. If the pastor includes verses thirteen through fifteen, the Doctrine of

God is central. However, if the entire chapter is preached, the Doctrine of Providence must be explained and applied.

This approach seems to be the approach of the biblical writers. They did not write topically, listing every single aspect of a particular doctrine in one location. Paul did not set out to write a theological textbook. By using this textual sermon form and the exegetical style of preaching described on the following page, the Scriptures become an integral part of the preaching exercise.³⁰⁶ The preacher, working through the Scriptures, will be at work preaching the whole counsel of God. The preacher will also see that application is already built into the text for him because the writers of the Bible were not as concerned with intellectual stimulation as they were in changed lives.

Exegetical Preaching

In these first two types of doctrinal sermons, the pastor will typically utilize an exegetical style. In this style, he will begin with verse one of chapter one and continue until he has preached through the entire book, providing a “running commentary” of sorts.

Erickson and Heflin again list advantages and disadvantages. A difficulty with this task is deciding on a particular book to study.³⁰⁷ Much thought must go into the selection of a book because, as in marriage, it is a long-term commitment. However, the listeners will eventually hear the whole counsel of God from the pastor who pursues this task. Another advantage that should occur in this method is that the pastor is less likely to

³⁰⁶ James K. A. Smith, “Theological Preaching: ‘Congregation Repellant,’” *Emmaus Journal* 2:2 (Winter 1993), 204.

³⁰⁷ However, a much more difficult task is to forego preaching through a book and having to decide each week which passage to study and preach.

bring foreign ideas into the text (eisegesis), although there is no guarantee this will be accomplished.

Erickson and Heflin suggest that “the preacher should commit to a series from a book specifically because he or she knows it contains doctrine about which he or she wishes to preach. When presented as part of a series on a book, the sermon on doctrine comes as no surprise to the congregation. This is a proper way to preach on doctrines that may be controversial or about which wide differences of opinion exist.”³⁰⁸

However, there are disadvantages to exegetical preaching. It is difficult to consistently maintain the major focus of each book. The author intended to convey certain meanings when writing a letter or narrative. The pastor must understand this meaning and will often have to remind his listeners again and again of that purpose. This review is even more important when people begin to attend a sermon series or return after being absent for a period. For this reason, each sermon must be a separate unit and able to stand alone.

Also, it is likely that such a course of action will necessitate staying in a particular book for a long period of time – perhaps years. Most people lack the attention span to stay interested in the series. At the same time, the pastor will neglect other areas of the Bible, not to mention the Christian calendar and seasons. These events interrupt sermon series and it is a difficult process to begin again with the same amount of zeal and focus.

Expository-Thematic Sermons

There are times when the pastor feels the need to preach on a particular doctrine for any number of good reasons. To do so at the proper time, the pastor cannot work

³⁰⁸ Erickson and Heflin, *Old Wine in New Wineskins*, 179.

through a book of the Bible where the doctrine is most clearly presented. Instead, he will find where that doctrine is presented clearly in a number of relevant biblical passages. As its name suggests, the topical sermon will preach to a particular issue or topic.

The topical sermon has fallen out of favor over the years for several reasons. First, the topical sermon typically offers no specific singular text for its base and structure. The topical sermon “skips around” from passage to passage, thereby offering a limited amount of biblical authority.³⁰⁹ Therefore, as Ronald Allen puts it, “the preacher [may] serve up a topical sermon for the congregation, but only for a healthy change of diet. Expository preaching . . . should be the staple in the diet.”³¹⁰

There are, as expected, some disadvantages of using the topical sermon. First, the secondary role of Scripture (the pastor starts with a topic, not a passage) means that the pastor must deal with a wide variety of passages in a single sermon. It is a difficult enough process to thoroughly study a single passage. The difficulty grows exponentially when studying multiple passages. The act of merely referring to a passage is a practice that only serves to show that the topic is mentioned several times in the Bible. Instead, listeners need to know what the Bible says *about* the topic. The sermon process will become much more difficult and time consuming. Also, the sermon’s structure will not occur naturally from the text. It is therefore easy for the pastor to lose his focus and to run after “rabbit trails” during the study and, more dangerously, in the delivery.

Narrative Sermons

The primary alternative to such teaching as described in the previous pages is narrative preaching. The Bible is mostly narrative, coming to us in story form. If the

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 183.

³¹⁰ Ronald Allen, *Preaching the Topical Sermon*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), as quoted in Erickson and Heflin, *Old Wine in New Wineskins*, 185.

structure of the passage often dictates the structure of the sermon, more of our sermons will be narrative. The Bible also often teaches in narrative. To preach a narrative sermon, several decisions must be made. First, the pastor must decide on the length of the unit of thought. Many narratives are short vignettes within a larger story. The context must be made clear and must be brought to the surface. Also, the preacher must decide from which perspective to preach the sermon (tell the story). Erickson and Heflin list six possibilities:

- 1) tell the story in connection with the continuing story;
- 2) tell the story as a free-standing entity;
- 3) tell the story as an interruption or parenthesis with the larger story;
- 4) tell the story from within the story as seen through the eyes of a character in the story;
- 5) tell the story from an outsider's perspective, like a newspaper reporter; and
- 6) retell the biblical story in the present tense.³¹¹

In doing any of these options, the pastor can present the narrative sermon in a dramatic monologue, an interview, a dialogue, or he may use multi-media capabilities to enhance the drama.

Finally, the speaker must think of the best way to give the doctrine preached the most clarity within the sermon. The doctrine can be presented within the story itself as the characters come to understand, or the pastor can “step out of character” at the conclusion to deliver the main point of the sermon.

³¹¹ Erickson and Heflin, *Old Wine in New Wineskins*, 207.

Didactic Form versus Narrative Form

Greidanus points out various advantages and disadvantages of each of these two popular sermon forms. He writes that the advantage of preaching a sermon in a didactic form is that it is “biblical to the extent that the theme summarizes the message of the text and the supporting points are taken from the text. It enables the listeners to follow and to check the exposition of the text.”³¹² He further argues that the didactic form provides a “clear and concise structure that provides the hearers with a solid, logical framework for understanding the sermon.”³¹³

However, there are disadvantages to the didactic sermon form. Some say that this form ignores the natural movement of the biblical text. The most serious objection to didactic sermon form is that

in reshaping the form of the text, it may unintentionally distort the message of the text. For passages whose aim is specifically to teach doctrine, the didactic form may work well, but for passages whose aim is to proclaim, to surprise, to encourage, to seek praise, etc., the didactic form is not very appropriate because the message “becomes transformed into an intellectual topic.”³¹⁴

Greidanus writes that “one cannot simply take the content of a biblical form, like milk in a container, and pour it indiscriminately into a different form. In literature, form and content are so intimately related that preachers must carefully select the appropriate form for the sermon if they would not distort the message of the text.”³¹⁵

The narrative sermon affords great flexibility in preaching: “it can present the biblical narrative, a contemporary narrative, or both; it can be with or without a theme; it

³¹² Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 146.

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Carl Zulstra, “God-Centered Preaching in a Human-Centered Age: The Developing Crisis Confronting Conservative Calvinist Reformed Church, 1935-1975,” Ph.D. diss (Princeton University, 1983), 143-44, as quoted in Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 147.

³¹⁵ Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 147.

can be developed inductively or deductively; it can follow the story line of the text or use another line of development. Preachers must choose from the many possibilities.”³¹⁶ This sermon form automatically provides the sermon with movement which will maintain the interest level of the congregation. Those same listeners are also involved in the story, using their imaginations, leading to yet another advantage: “the narrative form communicates implicitly rather than explicitly, obliquely rather than directly.”³¹⁷

The narrative sermon form is not without its own disadvantages. Some preachers fall in love with this form and make it the typical sermon form. This will lessen the effectiveness of subsequent sermons and also run the same risk seen earlier – the distortion of the text because the narrative form cannot be used with every type of passage.³¹⁸ Another possible problem stems from a very strong advantage – the indirect application of doctrine. The narrative sermon cannot have too much sermonizing or the entire effect is ruined. However, in avoiding allowing the personality of the preacher to overshadow the personality of the biblical character, the speaker runs the risk of allowing a variety of interpretations in the audience, often contradictory and unbiblical.

Digestible Doctrinal Sermons

It is a common understanding among preachers that doctrinal sermons do not elicit much excitement in the church. In fact, an announcement of the beginning of a new sermon series on “Different Lapsarian Views,” even with a better title, would elicit several yawns and multiple looks of dread.

However, these same yawning congregants would never admit that the Bible itself is dull. So, where is the dissonance? Stephen Rummage, professor of preaching at

³¹⁶ Ibid., 148-49.

³¹⁷ Ibid., 152.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, wrote that “a great number of doctrinal sermons are homiletical sleeping pills.”³¹⁹ He goes on to list several reasons why listeners fail to get excited over these sermons:

Some preachers are apt to create doctrinal messages that are overly intricate and complicated. They might use technical theological language that ordinary people cannot understand. Even worse, some preachers attempt to cram too much material into one sermon when they preach doctrinally. Chuck Swindoll gives this rebuke to preachers who have made doctrine a synonym for dullness: “The language you use is clergy code-talk, woefully lacking in relevance and reality. The terms you use are in-house jargon, seldom broken down into manageable units for people who aren’t clued in.”³²⁰

Rummage calls this apathy towards doctrinal preaching an indictment on the church because the same church needs doctrinal preaching. In fact, he says that “basic doctrine is the bedrock for the Christian belief system” and “everything the believer needs for a productive and godly life has its foundation in understanding theology.”³²¹

So, how can the preacher deliver a doctrinal sermon in such a way that he does not lose the audience? Ronald Allen lists several considerations to help the pastor make theology lively in the sermon.³²²

Ensure Movement in the Sermon

We have already established that there is no ideal form the sermon must take. However, the sermon must have movement within it, regardless of the form it takes. Movement is that aspect that keeps the listeners’ attention as the sermon progresses. Deductive sermons are easy to follow, and inductive sermons naturally keep the

³¹⁹ Rummage, *Planning Your Preaching*, 138.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Allen, *Preaching is Believing*, 81-97.

audience's attention as people work through the message to discover the "hidden surprise" at the end.

Begin the Sermon in a Way that Engages Interest and Suggests Importance

Allen writes that "the preacher can often whet the appetite of the congregation for systematic theology by beginning the sermon in a way that reveals the direction of the sermon while suggesting that the theological content to be explored is interesting and important."³²³ The preacher must put in the difficult work of introducing the sermon text and sermon idea (if a deductive sermon) in such a way that the listeners will make the decision to pay attention to what he has to say.

In January 2006, at the time of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday, I was asked to speak at a community-wide worship service centered around race relations. I was asked to speak about Dr. King but refused to do such during our church's regularly scheduled Sunday evening service. I instead chose to deliver a doctrinal sermon on "The Theology of Race." To make this sermon more palatable, I began by making the audience aware of the "elephant in the room" by recognizing the physical disparity among the listeners. I mentioned that we automatically "check people out" and "size them up." Sometimes it is age, or dress, or wealth, or size, or hair (or the absence thereof). I made them admit that most of them were doing that very thing with me, the speaker, at that very moment. I began by speaking of other "drastic" differences between people: some people have dangling ear lobes and others have attached ear lobes. This is a condition of our genetic code and out of our control. I then facetiously asked everyone to look around and find the "danglers" and the "attached." It soon became quite comical when other physical

³²³ Allen, *Preaching is Believing*, 83.

differences were brought to the forefront, such as whether or not your index finger is longer than your ring finger (as is typical in women but reversed typically for males). After naming a few such nonsensical physical differences, I mentioned the amount of pigmentation in one's skin. The connection was made, and a smooth transition was created to speak of the theology of race.

Clearly Define the Theological Topic

The minister should take nothing for granted regarding his audience unless he knows for certain the theological aptitude. I remember moving to a staff position in Kingsport, Tennessee in 1995, and soon hearing of the “Golden State Missions Offering.” I could not determine why Tennesseans were taking up an offering for Californians. It was not until the next year that I was informed that the offering was named after Dr. W.C. Golden, the state's former esteemed Director of Missions and his wife, the past president of Tennessee's Women's Missionary Auxiliary. The pastor assumed that I, and others in the church, knew the background for this offering and did not take the time to explain why we were giving monies to this cause. A single sentence could have spared a lot of confusion.

The pastor should clearly define even the most basic terms, such as sin and belief. After doing the audience analysis, the preacher should be aware of how the different types of church-attenders interpret such theological terminology.

Give the Theological Theme a Face

Allen writes that ‘the preacher can often help a doctrine or an aspect of systematic theology come alive by giving it a human face, that is, by telling something of the people,

events, and struggles that brought that element of doctrine or theology to expression.”³²⁴

In preaching a sermon on the day my church experienced the Lord’s Supper, I mentioned that from 1555 until 1558, almost three hundred people were burned at the stake. Their only crime was their personal belief about the Lord’s Supper. I asked my congregation, “What exactly did they believe that led to them being killed?” I told them that they believed the very same thing that almost all Baptists believe. It was amazing to note, that as we stood before that table prepared to partake of those elements, that such an act at one time put all of us at the risk of losing our lives. An even more amazing thought to ponder for most of us that morning was that there was a time when people thought that the issue of the Lord’s Supper was something worth dying for. Now, many of us see it as a bothersome ritual tacked on the end of a worship service that makes us a little late for the line at our favorite restaurant. We no longer live in an age where belief about the Lord’s Supper is marked by potential brutality. However, we have not made much progress. We now live in an age where the Lord’s Supper is often marked with superficiality.

On another occasion of the Lord’s Supper, I spoke of the controversy between Ulrich Zwingli and Martin Luther at the Marburg Colloquy in 1529. Almost everyone present knew of Luther, and many had heard of both of these men. It did help to put some “faces” on the theology of that message.

Call Attention to Denominational Perspective

Doctrine is definitional and divisive. I am a Baptist for theological reasons. Many people are Baptists (or Presbyterians or Methodists or Lutherans, etc.) but cannot explain why. Listeners benefit immensely by understanding what delineates the different bodies

³²⁴ Ibid., 86.

in their community. As stated earlier, doctrine is important to church-goers. Let them know clearly what you believe.

Tell Stories that Bring Theology to Life

Stephen Brown teaches at Reformed Theological Seminary and writes that he teaches the “T.U.L.I.P. of communication. The ‘I’ of the tulip is illustrate, illustrate, illustrate. [He says] to students, ‘If you can’t illustrate it, it’s not true.’ We forget that doctrine isn’t for doctrine’s sake and that theological propositions aren’t for theological propositions’ sake. Those are ways whereby we communicate the reality that we’ve discovered and . . . if you can’t illustrate it, it’s not true . . . don’t teach it ‘cause it doesn’t make any difference.”³²⁵ Allen writes that a story or illustration not only helps hold or regain the interest of the listener, but it also “adds to the credibility to the claim of the sermon by showing that the claim is true.”³²⁶

A good source for such information is biography and autobiography. I recently finished reading Walter Isaacson’s biography of Benjamin Franklin. I was shocked to read of his spiritual beliefs. One month before he died, Franklin wrote a response to Ezra Stiles, the President of Yale University (still a religious school at the time). In it, Franklin restated his creed: “I believe in one God, Creator of the Universe. That he governs it by his Providence. That he ought to be worshipped. That the most acceptable service we render him is doing good to his other children”³²⁷ Stiles had earlier asked Franklin if he believed in Jesus. Franklin said that was the first time he had ever been asked that question directly.

³²⁵ Steve Brown, “Preaching to Pagans” in *Communicate with Power*, 27.

³²⁶ Allen, *Preaching is Believing*, 89.

³²⁷ Walter Isaacson, *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 468.

Franklin further responded by saying that “the system of morals that Jesus provided was ‘the best the world ever saw or is likely to see.’”³²⁸ However, regarding the issue of Jesus' divinity, Franklin answered candidly, saying, “I have some doubts as to his divinity; though it is a question I do not dogmatize upon, having never studied it, and think it needless to busy myself with it now, when I expect soon an opportunity of knowing the truth with less trouble.”³²⁹ Franklin was right once more with this final statement. I mentioned the statement that no one had ever asked Franklin about Jesus Christ and made the application to our personal witness for Christ in this modern world.

Suggest Connections Between Theology and The Everyday World

The preacher often has to guide the listener to make the connections between the theological propositions and his or her personal life. The congregation wants to know the doctrine, and more importantly, needs to know the implications of that doctrine as it is fleshed out in their lives. Allen suggests that the pastor make a direct statement regarding these implications. In the above example, the pastor could state that the congregants must be active in sharing their Christian faith with those around them, whether the potential witness is a famous individual like Ben Franklin or an unknown person in the checkout line at the grocery store.

Deal Seriously with Questions

The Apostle Paul was masterful at anticipating potential questions in the minds of his skeptical readers. The ninth chapter of Romans exhibits his ability in all its clarity and brilliance. Sometimes the questions are simple, such as “What does that theological term mean? I don’t know the definition.” At other times the audience member will ask

³²⁸ Ibid., 468-69.

³²⁹ Ibid., 469.

questions that sound like this: “I see that principle in that passage, but what about this passage the John wrote in the previous chapter?” Other questions deal with experiential issues and practical implications of living out that particular doctrine. Again, using the Franklin illustration, an expected question is “What are some practical ways I can share my faith and strike up spiritual conversations with people, and, once I do, what do I say to them?”

The bold preacher will allow congregants to actually ask questions, if the setting allows such interaction. This can be done in a “question-and-answer” format at the end of the service, or listeners can be directed to write down questions to be handled at another time. This was done recently at my church as Brian Burgess, the minister of youth, delivered a sermon for his first year’s work in the Doctor of Ministry program at Gordon-Conwell. It was a fruitful and even enjoyable time of interacting with the body regarding the message of his sermon.

Name Your Own Convictions

Allen states that “as a general rule, it is good for preachers to name their own theological convictions forthrightly in the sermon. Not only is this disclosure a matter of integrity, but many people want to know where their pastor stands and why, so that they can dialogue with him or her around matters of theological importance.”³³⁰ Allen further suggests that preachers give detailed explanations of how they arrived at their theological conclusions. By telling of their own journeys, Allen says that preachers “can create a bond between themselves and the congregation, as the people recognize their own struggles. This telling can also teach the congregation, through example, how laity can

³³⁰ Allen, *Preaching is Believing*, 94.

think their way though theological questions.”³³¹ Allen, who differs significantly in some areas of orthodox Christianity,³³² says that articulating his beliefs, however different, brings about three reactions. First, people respect his integrity. Second, many will express interest in trying to understand the differences and why he believes what he believes. Third, people recognize that they often share similar convictions but could not name them or own them.³³³ I would add that a fourth reaction is possible and even likely: listeners will dismiss him as unorthodox.

Embody the Sermon in an Engaging Way

The term “embodiment” is used the same way many preachers use the term “sermon delivery.” Allen says that the message and the pastor are “conjoined in the moment of preaching.”³³⁴ There is more to delivery than simple delivery. He notes that preachers who are normally rather animated while telling a story become downright subdued when didactically speaking of doctrine. Allen says that this inadvertently teaches that doctrine is not as vital as the illustration and has the further effect of allowing minds to wander. He suggests that preachers maintain their energy level when discussing doctrine. Be excited about the truth if the truth is a celebratory one. If the doctrine is more sober, then of course, the preacher must speak with all due solemnity. The congregation should be able to see that the preacher is passionate about what he believes. In doing so, the congregation may understand that theology matters!

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Ibid., 95. For example, Allen writes “While I do not believe that God is omnipotent, I believe that God has more power than any other entity and that God’s power is inexhaustible.”

³³³ Ibid., 96.

³³⁴ Ibid.

The Objectives of Doctrinal Preaching

The preacher must always bear in mind what he wants to accomplish in preaching a doctrinal sermon. Erickson and Heflin list ten objectives in such a practice.³³⁵ First, we preach a doctrinal sermon to counter the widespread opposition to Christianity. Our world is changing. Islam is widely believed to be the fastest-growing religion in the world. The national news media and Hollywood elite often show their hatred of evangelical Christianity flagrantly. Doctrinal sermons will help alleviate fear and doubt in the mind of the congregant who hears so much opposition.

Second, we preach doctrinal sermons to refute error, from outside the church, of course, but also from within. Paul had to do this repeatedly in his epistles, and error still springs forth from inside the church today. New movements arise every month and discernment must be exercised.

Third, we preach doctrinal sermons to provide a positive apologetic for the church. The people in our churches must know what they believe and why they believe it. Biblical faith is joined by reason and enjoins the heart and the mind.

Fourth, we preach doctrinal sermons to help people realize why we do the things we do and what makes us who we are. Doctrinal sermons help reveal the doctrinal distinctives between the religions and Protestant denominations.

Fifth, we preach doctrinal sermons to prepare our people for the advance of cults and sects and other strange non-Christian movements. I remember hearing in a seminary class that a great number of Mormon converts are former Baptists. Cults like the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses often seem to target nominal denominationalists, hoping their knowledge is cursory at best. It often is.

³³⁵ Erickson, *Old Wine in New Wineskins*, 258-259.

Sixth, we preach doctrinal sermons to help establish new church plants and new congregations. They must have firm theological footing.

Seventh, we preach doctrinal sermons to reaffirm the beliefs we hold. Doubts can arise in anyone and forgetfulness can take over when doctrinal teaching is absent over a period of time. We all need review now and then.

Eighth, we preach doctrinal sermons to orient new church members and to equip young Christians in the faith.

Ninth, we preach doctrinal sermons to educate and acquaint visitors with our churches. Some churches have classes to meet this need. All pastors can preach doctrinal sermons to accomplish this need and the others in this list.

Finally, we preach doctrinal sermons to establish our identity. Pastors, congregations and denominations should be known in the community by what they stand for. Too many know what we stand against; let them know what we stand for.

The Effects of Doctrinal Preaching

Ronald Allen lists six possible effects the doctrinal sermon will have on the listeners.³³⁶ First, the sermon may reinforce or clarify the audiences' beliefs. Sometimes a doctrinal sermon will reinforce the denominational or ecclesiastical beliefs that the body does know or should know.

Second, the doctrinal sermon may enlarge the theological vision of the audience. The audience may settle for limited understanding of topics such as missions, evangelism or baptism. Pastors can challenge their congregants to expand their knowledge. Churches

³³⁶ Allen, *Preaching is Believing*, 73-79.

often develop a rather insular perspective and need to see that there is more to Christianity than “southern evangelicalism” or “northwestern postmodernism.”

Third, the doctrinal sermon may help a community of believers sort through theological matters that are currently causing conflict or controversy. Many sermons were preached on the Sunday after September 11, 2001. Many sermons were preached after the tsunamis or Hurricane Katrina. Many sermons were preached after America went to war in the Middle East or after momentous social changes. Several of those sermons gave encouragement as God’s sovereignty of nature and nations was expounded. Doctrinal sermons will help bring healing and understanding to the challenging topics in the world around us.

Fourth, the doctrinal sermon may help hearers remember aspects of theology that they have forgotten. It is not uncommon for one to be a Christian and not know why she is such, or to be a Baptist and not understand what distinctives make her a Baptist. The sporadic participation in the Lord’s Supper or even baptism may lead some to forget the significance of the ordinances. A doctrinal sermon will help to refresh those memories.

Fifth, the doctrinal sermon can help believers overcome difficulties in the tradition and help the congregation discover revitalized theological promise. Sixth, the doctrinal sermon may do the drastic deed of calling into question and even correcting what the community currently believes. Luther’s sermons at the outset of the Reformation were surely useful in correcting errant soteriology and ecclesiology. The doctrinal sermons of the 1960s helped the civil rights cause. Doctrinal sermons on social issues such as homosexuality and abortion have the potential to be used by God to transform minds and opinions. Doctrinal preaching has its place in the modern pulpit. It

cannot and should not be avoided by the pastor who truly wants to preach the whole counsel of God.

Planning for Doctrinal Preaching

A long time ago, I heard that I was never as good as I thought I was on my best day and never as bad as I thought I was on my worst day. That applies to preaching as well. Stephen Rummage says that “consistent excellence is the key to success in any endeavor,” including preaching.³³⁷ He uses the baseball career of Joe DiMaggio as an example. DiMaggio is one of the all-time great players, but he was never flashy or flamboyant. He was not a home-run king; however, he was consistent, and he was consistently good. He built his career on reliability.

The preacher should try to do the same with his ministry in the pulpit – aim for consistency week in and week out. Some weeks, you will hit it out of the park. Other weeks, you will strike out. The aim, as Rummage says, is to try to get a hit every week instead of hoping for the big three-run home run every once in a while.

The Benefits of Planning your Sermons

Consistently excellent preaching requires planning. Though this is not a difficult process, most preachers do not take the time to do so. Yet, there are tremendous benefits in doing so.³³⁸ First, planning your preaching allows for greater leadership of the Holy Spirit. Being omniscient, God knows what your congregation needs next week and next year. He can work through your time of study to prepare you to say what they need to hear.

³³⁷ Rummage, *Planning Your Preaching*, 11.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 23-32.

Second, planning your sermons creates greater diversity in your preaching. If they could, some preachers would speak on the end times or about salvation every single week (and some have). However, preachers are called to preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). It is unlikely that a preacher will knowingly and purposefully plan to preach an entire year on one subject or to use one type of sermon.

Third, good planning will lead you to teach your congregation systematically. The preaching plan is like a syllabus in a classroom. It shows you where you are planning to go and how to get there. Fourth, planning helps to create meaningful and cohesive worship services. If your music leader knows where you are going from week to week and month to month, he or she can choose songs and hymns that emphasize the same themes and build on the same ideas as your sermons. Music directors will greatly appreciate it.

Fifth, planning preaching will eventually save time. I have experienced the horrible process of wondering what to preach the upcoming Sunday. Rummage says the only thing worse than sitting at your desk on Monday and not knowing what to preach on Sunday is sitting at your desk on Saturday and not knowing what to preach on Sunday. With a planned series of sermons, you always know what to preach next, and you can get right to work at the beginning of each week.

Sixth, planning also helps protect your time. The pastoral ministry is filled with interruptions. Sometimes you are not able to put in the hours you want or need. Planning allows you to work ahead to some degree and those emergencies that crop up are not so harrowing.

Seventh, planning allows you to speak to timely subjects. The Holy Spirit often

works amazingly to lead you to preach a particular sermon at just the right time, even though you planned the sermon months before the need to hear it arose. The wise preacher will also realize that the sermon calendar is not set in stone, and it can be put aside for a week for extraordinary reasons.

Eighth, planning your sermons will help you build your library. There are not many preachers who do not love books. Planning your sermons will lead you to purchase books that you know you will need in the future. Research the best books available on the topic, text, or doctrine you will be speaking to, and purchase them ahead of time. Over time, your library will grow and be a great service to you and your congregation.

Ninth, planning your sermons will reduce stress, which relates directly to reasons five and six. The preacher needs to be able to relax in his “down-time.” Yet, many cannot because his mind is constantly thinking and searching for ideas. Planning allows the preacher to rest, knowing that his sermon preparation is under control.

Finally, we see that planning sermons will heighten creativity. Working at the end of a deadline crushes creativity. Working with weeks to go to the deadline enhances creativity. The preacher who plans will have time to conduct research and think of good illustrations. Rummage says that the mind never stops thinking. With information to work with and time to work, the preacher will be surprised at the illustrations and ideas that occur naturally throughout the day.

With these benefits in mind, the harried preacher is advised to take the time to plan a month’s worth of sermons, at a minimum. Once the advantage is felt, a long span of sermons will be planned until perhaps a year’s work is laid on the desk. I wholeheartedly endorse Stephen Rummage’s *Planning Your Preaching: A Step-By-Step Guide*

for Developing a One-Year Preaching Calendar or Andrew Blackwood's *Planning a Year's Pulpit Work* to learn more about planning in general.

Planning Doctrinal Sermons

Planning a doctrinal sermon series requires some specific thinking. Sermons that deal with theological topics will require even more study and research. According to Erickson and Heflin, there are several things to consider when planning to preach doctrinal sermons.³³⁹

The preacher must assess the congregation's needs. The preacher must be able to tap into the minds of his listeners and to determine what they need to learn. This can be done in several ways. The pastor can conduct a survey, either asking people directly or having the people complete a questionnaire about their understanding of doctrine or their desire to learn more about a specific doctrine. This is not the same as "tickling their ears" even though some might take it that way. Prepare your people by letting them know what information you are seeking and why you are seeking their opinions. Another option Erickson and Heflin suggest is to let the congregation submit questions they might have to the pastoral staff. The pastor would be well served to answer a question each Sunday night. Pastors would also be served well by forming a group of parishioners with whom he could meet regularly to discuss these topics.

A brief survey of the current events of the world may open opportunities to preach on certain doctrines. For instance, the recent *The Da Vinci Code* craze allowed preachers to naturally preach on the doctrine of the Bible and the divinity of Jesus Christ.

³³⁹ Erickson and Heflin, *Old Wine in New Wineskins*, 244-260.

Erickson and Heflin also suggest that the preacher keep an accurate record of all his sermon texts and topics.³⁴⁰ This is vital in preaching doctrine because it will keep us from climbing back on our favorite theological hobby-horse or, at the other extreme, neglecting certain doctrines.

In planning your sermons, review your church or denominational calendar. Holidays and denominational emphases will provide ample opportunity to preach doctrinally. In my Southern Baptist Convention, we recognize such days as “Sanctity of Life Sunday” and specific days of mission emphasis. When national holidays such as Christmas, Easter and Thanksgiving are considered, the preacher will have a more difficult time trying to fit doctrinal sermons into the schedule instead of determining which doctrine to preach. Erickson and Heflin lists several other suggestions: preach the lectionary, conduct doctrine weeks with periods of special studies, sponsor doctrine conferences, teach the doctrine found in hymns, speak to local cults and other religions, and many more.³⁴¹

There are ample opportunities to preach doctrinally. This can cause problems, however. Rummage writes that “when planning for a doctrinal sermon, a preacher is likely to be tempted to squeeze all of the biblical teaching on a doctrine into a single message. One homiletician observes that such a message would require comparatively little time to prepare and would make practically no impression on the hearer.”³⁴² Instead of trying to say everything you can about a single doctrine in a single sermon, tell the congregation what one biblical text has to say about that doctrine.³⁴³ If needed, develop a

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 247.

³⁴¹ Ibid., 254-55.

³⁴² Rummage, *Planning Your Preaching*, 148.

³⁴³ Ibid., 149.

series on that doctrine. The preacher can develop a list of the major doctrines he wishes to cover in a year's time. Every doctrine need not be covered, and every aspect of the doctrines chosen need not be dealt with entirely. Instead, Rummage suggests that the preacher try to imagine someone in the congregation with little to no biblical knowledge and ask, "What are the absolute basics of Christianity that I would want this person to discover through my preaching?"³⁴⁴

In preaching doctrine, that imaginary person (who is not imaginary after all), will be built up in the grace of the Lord. As Phillips Brooks said,

No preaching ever had any strong power that was not the preaching of doctrine. The preachers that have moved and held men have always preached doctrine. No exhortation to a good life that does not put behind it some truth as deep as eternity can seize and hold the conscience. Preach doctrine, preach all the doctrine that you know, and learn forever more and more; but preach it always, not that men may believe it, but that men may be saved by believing it. So it shall be live, not dead. So men shall rejoice and not decry it. So they shall feed on it at your hands as on the bread of life, sold and sweet, and claiming for itself the appetite of man which God made for it.³⁴⁵

³⁴⁴ Ibid., 152.

³⁴⁵ Phillips Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching* (London: H.R. Allenson, 1878), 129, as quoted in Ibid., 160.

Chapter 4 – The Project

This thesis-project is written to help pastors understand the importance of doctrinal preaching and to assist them in the preparation and delivery of doctrinal sermons. In a typical homiletics course using Haddon Robinson's *Biblical Preaching* text, the first several weeks are spent discussing foundational elements such as the big idea, developmental questions, outlines, introductions, and conclusions. Near the end of the semester, class time is often given to discussing various sermon forms such as the first-person narrative sermon. I hope that time would also be provided to discuss the preaching of a doctrinal sermon.

This lesson plan will incorporate material from Chapters Two and Three of this thesis to assist the homiletics teacher. The doctrinal sermon does not differ greatly from other expository sermons. However, there are aspects of doctrinal preaching that must be understood by the student.

I will teach this proposed class to the pastoral staff at Western Avenue Baptist Church in Statesville, North Carolina. I serve as the Minister of Education alongside six other staff members who serve by teaching and preaching. At the conclusion of this class, I will gather input from the participants with a survey to measure the effectiveness of this lesson.

The Teaching Plan

This class is designed to be taught in a single class period to students enrolled in homiletics classes using the textbook *Biblical Preaching* by Dr. Haddon Robinson. In this class, discussion will center on certain considerations in preaching a doctrinal sermon

that differ from other sermons. This lesson was taught by the author in a single class session of one hour and fifteen minutes with ample class discussion.

Prerequisites

As this course is to be taught near the end of the course *Biblical Preaching*, it is expected that the students will have mastered the hermeneutical and homiletical material in that book. The students should also have previously received adequate training in biblical hermeneutics, bible survey, systematic theology, and other relevant courses.

Instructional Outcome

The student will be able to prepare and deliver an expository doctrinal sermon.

Instructional Goals

Goal #1: Students will learn how to prepare a doctrinal sermon.

Goal #2: Students will learn how to deliver a doctrinal sermon.

Instructional Objectives

Goal #1: Students will learn how to prepare a doctrinal sermon.

Objective #1: Students will recite the definition of doctrinal preaching.

Objective #2: Students will recognize and state the subject/complement and the doctrine presented in various biblical texts.

Objective #3: Students will define and practice the process of universalizing and particularizing doctrine.

Goal #2: Students will learn how to deliver a doctrinal sermon.

Objective #1: Students will differentiate between various sermon forms and explain how doctrinal sermons fit within each one.

Objective #2: Students will list methods needed to present doctrine to ensure the sermon is understandable and applicable.

Class Teaching Notes

Introduction

Compare and contrast the practice of Jonathan Edwards and John Newton as two ways pastors deal with doctrinal issues (see pages 65-69 of this paper for fuller treatment).

Two famous preachers faced separate doctrinal problems in their churches. They handled them quite differently. Jonathan Edwards assumed the pastorate after the death of his father-in-law and immediately began to institute radical changes in church practice based on doctrine. Edwards pushed for regenerate church membership; whereas, his predecessor allowed all to partake in communion. He also refused to baptize the children of unsaved parents. He was eventually dismissed.

John Newton, the author of *Amazing Grace*, disdained doctrinal controversy. He did not preach against any false teaching but said “My principle method of defeating heresy is by establishing truth. One proposes to fill a bushel with tares: now, if I can fill it first with wheat, I shall defy his attempts.” As much as Edwards was fearless in controversy, Newton’s disdain for controversy met with sad results as well. An historian wrote that Newton “was hardly dead till many of his people went far astray.”

Ask: In your opinion, which historical figure took the best approach in handling doctrinal conflict? Why?

Al Mohler says that “Every pastor is called to be a theologian.” Do you agree? Why or why not?

Ask: If this is true, why do some of the most popular preachers today fail to preach theologically or doctrinally?

Ask: Have you recently preached or heard a doctrinal sermon? What were your thoughts? Was it effective?

So, how do you go about the process of preparing a doctrinal sermon as opposed to a “regular” expository sermon?

Goal #1: Students will learn how to prepare a doctrinal sermon.

Before we begin to prepare a doctrinal sermon, we must understand what a doctrinal sermon is.

Objective #1: Students will recite the definition of doctrinal preaching in their own words.

Ask: What is doctrinal preaching?

William Carl says that “all preaching is doctrinal.” Do you agree with that statement?

When you preach, you are presenting doctrine in some form. The questions are, “Is that doctrine biblical?” and “Is that doctrine the primary focus of this text?” Doctrine is biblical only if it accurately teaches and applies what the biblical writers intended for their original audience.

Haddon Robinson states that preaching is the communication of an idea that is derived from Scripture and transmitted through a grammatical, historical, and literary study of a passage in its context which the Holy Spirit first applies to the life and personality of the preacher and then to the hearer.

As you already know, the primary task of the preacher is to discern and communicate the “Big Idea” of a particular passage of Scripture. In doctrinal preaching, the “idea” that is derived from Scripture and transmitted through study is a particular doctrine. Therefore, the definition of doctrinal preaching is similar to the one above, change the word “idea” to “doctrine.”

Every major passage contains doctrine on some level (see Mohler’s treatment of “doctrinal triage” on pages 147-148). However, only certain passages have doctrine as their big idea. When the preacher determine that the big idea of a passage is a particular doctrine, he should preach a doctrinal sermon. With this in mind, let’s look at some practical helps in preparing a doctrinal sermon.

Just as in a “regular” sermon, there are three basic starting points. The preacher may start with the text, with an issue, or with a doctrine. In starting with a text, the preacher will expose the meaning of the text. In an expository doctrinal sermon, the preacher will bring out the doctrine being taught in that passage and explain and apply the message of that doctrine.

The preacher who starts his sermon preparation with an issue will search the scriptures for words relating to that particular issue. Similarly, the preacher may also start with a particular doctrine in mind. In starting with a doctrine, the preacher will discover where that doctrine is most clearly taught and then hopefully proceed as in a textual sermon.

If you start with an issue, the preacher can be accused of meddling or inserting his own opinion in his “bully pulpit.” If he start with a doctrine, the pastor can be charged with “riding a hobby-horse.” It is usually best to begin with a text. While a single passage will rarely tell us everything we need to know of a particular doctrine, it will provide sufficient illumination.

If you are committed to expository preaching, your starting point will not necessarily matter because your main objective will remain the same in each case: exegete the passage and communicate the meaning of the passage by applying it first to your life and then to the lives of your hearers.

Objective #2: Students will recognize and state the subject/complement and the doctrine presented in various biblical texts.

It is best to start with a text, usually the text that follows your previous text as you work through a book of the Bible. As stated earlier, every major passage contains doctrine on some level, but only certain passages have a doctrine as their big idea.

Divide the class into two sections, and tell the students to join with their neighbors to complete the following instructions as they look at one of the two classic texts below:

1. Discover the subject/complement of the passage assigned
2. Discern any doctrine presented in the passage
3. Decide whether or not the doctrine equivalent to the big idea
 - Isaiah 44:6-8 (God's omniscience and exhaustive foreknowledge)
 - Romans 5:12-21 (original sin)

In all passages, William Carl gives us several questions to ask as we exegete a passage to preach a doctrinal sermon. (It will be helpful to choose a small passage of Scripture to use as an example.)

- 1) What doctrine(s) appear in this text?
- 2) How do these doctrines fit into the context of this book of the Bible?
- 3) How do these doctrines fit into the context of the whole canon?
- 4) Does the form of this passage affect interpretation? (genre, rhetorical function)
- 5) What is the major theological thrust of this passage? Is this a first-order doctrine or a second-order (or lower) doctrine?
- 6) The passage may present more than one doctrine. Which doctrine is most directly related to the theological thrust (big idea) of the passage?
- 7) What questions would your congregation or culture ask about this passage?
- 8) What image is being used to bring this doctrine into focus?
- 9) What structure (sermon form) should be used to preach the doctrine of this passage?

Objective #3: Students will define and practice the process of universalizing and particularizing doctrine.

As you discern that a particular doctrine is the big idea of a particular text, there are considerations to keep in mind while preparing a doctrinal sermon:

- 1) Books of the Bible were written to a particular audience in a particular culture at a particular time to deal with a particular situation. Some issues were localized (most of I Corinthians), and some were universal (I Corinthians 15). In both cases, the pastor must "universalize" and "particularize" the doctrine (examined below).
- 2) Modern listeners are also bound culturally and chronologically. We all bring thoughts, biases, and traditions to the text.
- 3) We must differentiate within the text what is doctrinal and what is not. We must delineate between what is "prescribed" and what is "described."

So, with these things in mind, how can we make this doctrine understandable?

This process, called “universalization” by Millard Erickson, involves interpreting the passage and its doctrine and bringing them into the modern world. You often cannot bring the biblical doctrine directly into the 21st century or you will be teaching people to abstain from catfish (Lev 11:9-10) or to purchase swords (Luke 22:36) or to poke out one of their eyes (Matt 5:29-30).

This universalization is a three-step process:

- 1) Determine the meaning of the ancient writer to the ancient reader. You should have already accomplished this step.
- 2) Determine the permanent and universal essence of that meaning. What is the ultimate truth the biblical writer is trying to communicate?
- 3) Make a contemporary application of that truth that mirrors the application being made in the passage.

In order to do this final step, we must “decontextualize” ourselves and our audience. As stated previously, we come to the text with ideas and traditions and often read the Bible through our own grid. It is suggested that the pastor debate doctrines from “both sides of the aisle.” This will force pastors to examine presuppositions.

The pastor must also decontextualize the passage. It was written to an original audience in a particular culture at a particular time. The pastor must visit that time and place to discover why the biblical writer deemed that particular doctrine necessary to be taught.

Finally, the pastor must then particularize (or recontextualize) the doctrine. How does one get the meaning of a word or phrase across to a different age or culture without sacrificing content? We must exegete our culture and to discern where the passage parallels current situations and where it does not. For example, Paul writes that it is a dishonor for a man to have long hair or a woman to have short hair (1 Corinthians 11:14-15). What does that mean today for individuals with a wide variety of hair styles in the average church?

There are three more steps:

- 1) Length – bring the truth from the past to the present. This is usually done in the exegesis.
- 2) Width – exegete the culture. Our culture continues to splinter so this is growing more difficult.
- 3) Height – adjust to accommodate the different levels of understanding in your audience. Articulate the teaching in a way that people can understand. In other words, “Eschew obfuscation!”

Walt Kaiser summarizes well, saying:

- 1) The main burden of doctrinal teaching must rest on the chair passages (the major passages that explain the doctrine most clearly and thoroughly).
- 2) Exegesis is prior to any system of theology.

- 3) Doctrines must not go beyond scriptural evidence.
- 4) The analogy of scripture takes priority over the analogy of faith. Read the Bible forward in time.
- 5) Only what is taught directly in Scripture is binding on the conscience.
- 6) No doctrine should be based entirely on a single passage of Scripture, a parable, an allegory, a type, or an uncertain textual reading.
- 7) Theological interpretation must recognize its responsibility to the church.

Goal #2: Students will learn how to deliver a doctrinal sermon.

After all the work in the study, the pastor must make his way to the pulpit. There are some aspects of doctrinal preaching that must be explained when speaking of sermon delivery.

Doctrinal sermons are not always topical sermons; they can be expositional. There is no such thing as a sermon form; only forms that sermons take (Haddon Robinson). With the sermon usually being didactic in nature, most doctrinal sermons are developed deductively with the “big idea” presented early in the sermon and developed from that point. However, there are various ways to preach a doctrinal sermon.

Objective #1: Students will differentiate between various sermon forms and explain how doctrinal sermons fit within each one.

You can preach an **expository-textual** sermon, using a short or long passage of Scripture. The only limiting factor is that the passage must be a complete unit of thought. Many doctrines are presented in short fashion (Gal 2:20; Rom 8:29-30; Eph 2:8-9). While preaching through a book of the Bible, these verses can be singled out for the doctrine they contain. The shortness of the passage aids in listener retention and helps the pastor stay focused.

You can preach an **expository-passage** sermon. This is similar to the above but merely deals with a larger unit of thought. In longer passages, it is more difficult to center the passage on a single doctrine. For instance, in Exodus 3, at least three doctrines appear: revelation (through v. 9); providence (through v. 15); and God (the entire chapter).

This approach is the approach of the biblical authors. They did not write topically, listing all we need to know about a doctrine in a single place.

You can also preach **expository-thematic** sermons (topical sermons).

You can also preach **narrative** sermons. The Bible is mostly narrative, and doctrine is presented in narrative sections. Decide on the length of the unit of thought, and decide from which perspective you will tell the story. You have at least six possibilities:

- 1) tell the story as it connects to surrounding stories
- 2) tell as a free-standing story
- 3) tell as an interruption to larger story
- 4) tell the story within the story through the eyes of a character
- 5) tell the story from an outsider’s perspective

- 6) tell the story in the present tense, bringing the Bible to the present time.

The didactic sermon form (exegetical forms above) provides a clear and concise structure. However, the narrative form follows the natural movement of the biblical text.

Objective #2: Students will list methods necessary to present comprehensible and applicable doctrine.

How do you deliver a doctrinal sermon so that you do not lose the audience?

- 1) Ensure movement in the sermon. This keeps attention.
- 2) Begin the sermon in a way that engages interest and suggests importance. Whet the audience's appetite (example of "Theology of Race" sermon on pp. 183ff).
- 3) Clearly define the theological topic. Take nothing for granted when considering the congregation's knowledge of a subject.
- 4) Give the theological theme a face. Reveal how this doctrine has affected people through the centuries. Tell of the struggles in determining this doctrine.
- 5) Call attention to denominational perspective. Doctrinal identity is important.
- 6) Tell stories that bring theology to life. Illustrate, illustrate, illustrate. Biography is a good source (see Ben Franklin example on page 186).
- 7) Suggest connections between theology and the "real world." You may have to guide the listener.
- 8) Deal seriously with questions. At the beginning, use Paul's method of "imaginary objections" in discussing the doctrine.
- 9) Name your own convictions. The people in the pew want and need to know where you stand on this issue.
- 10) Embody the sermon and doctrine in an engaging way. Be passionate about the truth of God's Word.

Preach doctrinal sermons. Phillips Brooks wrote:

No preaching ever had any strong power that was not the preaching of doctrine. The preachers that have moved and held men have always preached doctrine. No exhortation to a good life that does not put behind it some truth as deep as eternity can seize and hold the conscience. Preach doctrine, preach all the doctrine that you know, and learn forever more and more; but preach it always, not that men may believe it, but that men may be saved by believing it. So it shall be live, not dead. So men shall rejoice and not decry it. So they shall feed on it at your hands as on the bread of life, solid and sweet, and claiming for itself the appetite of man which God made for it.

Chapter 5 – Conclusions

Introduction

In fulfillment of the requirements for this thesis, a class on the preparation and delivery of expository doctrinal sermons was presented to the ministerial staff of Western Avenue Baptist Church. The class met on Wednesday, November 1, 2006. We began at 9:00 AM and concluded at 10:15 AM after ample discussion and interaction between the students and the teacher. Six individuals attended the session:

- Dr. James Cartin, Senior Pastor – Dr. Cartin was a student in the first “The Preacher and the Message” Doctor of Ministry track in Charlotte in the early 1990s. Dr. Cartin earned his bachelor's degree from the University of South Carolina. He received his Master of Divinity from Western Seminary and his Doctor of Ministry from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina.
- Brian Burgess, Minister of Youth – Brian received his Bachelor's degree from Gardner-Webb University in 1998, and earned his Master of Divinity degree at Gardner-Webb Divinity School in May 2004. Brian is currently a student in Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, taking “The Preacher and the Message” Doctor of Ministry track that began in Charlotte in the spring of 2006.
- Ed Yarbrough, Minister to Senior Adults – Ed is a retired pastor with over forty years of preaching experience. He has an earned doctorate from Covington Theological Seminary in Kentucky.

- Mark Collins, Minister of Middle School – Mark received his Bachelor’s degree from North Carolina State University in 2004, and is currently pursuing his Master of Divinity from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Charlotte.
- Philip McGaha, Minister of Administration - Philip received his bachelor’s degree at Gardner-Webb University and earned the Master of Arts in Religious Education degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.
- Rodney Harrison, Minister of Music –Rodney is currently working towards his Bachelor of Arts in Music at the University of North Carolina in Charlotte.

The purpose of this class session was to impress upon the students the value and importance of preaching doctrinal sermons in our current evangelical environment. This class was designed to be part of a general introductory course in homiletics. Therefore, the typical student taking this class would be first- or second-year students at a Bible college or seminary. I asked the students to consider themselves as such, though Dr. Cartin and others had trouble “staying in character.” At times in the discussion, it was obvious that they had failed in raising or lowering themselves to that particular academic level.

As part of a typical homiletics course, this class would naturally fall near the end of the semester. After mastering all the material in preparing and delivering an expository sermon, many homiletics teachers will spend time dealing with various sermon forms. For instance, class time will often be devoted to discussing the dramatic narrative sermon form. There are several aspects of preaching this particular type of sermon that the

preacher must understand. In the same way, the author is hopeful that class time would likewise be devoted to understanding the particularities of preaching a doctrinal sermon that differ from other types of expository sermons. These differences are highlighted in chapter four.

Student Evaluations

All participants responded positively in the completed surveys. Three questions were asked using a Likert Scale of 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). Each question received a “five” from all participants except for one 4 (good) for question three. The questions asked were:

- 1) The delivery of the seminar was: (circle one)
- 2) The content of the seminar was: (circle one)
- 3) The overall effectiveness of the seminar was: (circle one)

The initial reaction to such high marks is to think that those surveyed were being kind in their assessments of a co-worker. However, in later discussing the evaluations with the students in the office, I found that they truly did find the class to be beneficial. I especially appreciated the comments made by Dr. Cartin and Brian Burgess, the two men who have sat under the teaching of Haddon Robinson and who regularly fill the pulpit at Western Avenue Baptist Church. Dr. Cartin noted that it was a very well done presentation and that it “sounded like something that would take place in Haddon’s classroom.”³⁴⁶

The open-ended questions revealed even more about the effectiveness of the seminar. The students were asked “Did you learn anything new in this seminar? If so, what?” Dr. Cartin wrote, “I was aware of most of the seminar material, but I especially

³⁴⁶ Personal conversation on November 2, 2006.

benefited from the last several slides about how to preach a doctrinal sermon.” The material from these slides dealt with practical advice on delivering a doctrinal sermon and can be found on pages 188-196 of this thesis. Brian Burgess wrote that he learned it is best to preach a doctrinal sermon from the chair passages, as described earlier by Dr. Walt Kaiser. I was glad to hear Brian say this as it is a key point in preaching expository doctrinal sermons as opposed to systematic theological lectures made up mostly of lists of abstract thoughts from all over the Bible. It is easy to argue with a systematic theologian because other verses can always be imported into the conversation. However, in using a single passage to preach an expository message about a single doctrine, the preacher will avoid much of the controversy if the proper work is done in the exegetical stages.

Mark Collins wrote that he appreciated learning of the importance of doctrinal preaching. He wrote that “sometimes the implications of not preaching a particular doctrine are more costly than the division that is usually thought to be brought on by those same doctrines.” Mark is obviously referring to the opening illustration of the pastoral styles of Jonathan Edwards and John Newton. However, he is correct. It is often suggested that doctrine is to be avoided because it only divides. I disagree. Christians are people of the book, and we must know that book and understand that truth unites. Philip McGaha echoed that sentiment when he wrote that he learned of the “danger of being so practical.”

Philip noted that it is not a good thing for pastors to preach a steady diet of “how-to” sermons. He wrote that “people need more than that.” Rodney Harrison, the minister of music, admitted that he learned “the scope and overall concerns that must be addressed

in the preparation of a sermon.” Rodney has no training in hermeneutics or homiletics and forgot that he was to play the part of a student who had already mastered the foundational aspects of this course. At the very least, he came away with a great appreciation of the work that goes into preparing a sermon in general and a doctrinal sermon in particular.

The students then answered the question, “What do you believe this seminar’s strengths were?” The following statements were made: “thorough,” “interesting,” “good practical guides to a doctrinal sermon,” “good information,” “logical progression,” “passion evident,” “understandable presentation of difficult material,” “organization was coherent and followed a logical progression,” “accomplished the goal of what was presented at the beginning of the instruction,” and “I gained a better understanding of what goes into good expository preaching on doctrine.” As the answers indicate, the students felt the session was successful in relaying information and doing so in an understandable way.

The next question asked, “What do you believe this seminar’s weaknesses were?” The answers are as follows: “need more of it,” “needed a few more illustrations but he did give short examples that caught the thrust,” “almost too much content for one hour,” “Powerpoint slides were too crowded on occasion,” “it was a tough class – two had the advantage of knowing the material ahead of time, but you handled it very well,” “I am not confused based on the content given but realize I would be interested to know more.”

The final question asked, “What would you suggest to make this seminar more effective?” The answers are as follows: “I can’t think of anything except maybe I (the student) could have been better prepared with the sample passages,” “divide the class into

two sessions so we could really go back and work through the Romans passage with what we have been taught,” “illustrate-illustrate-illustrate,” and “provide more time for discussion.”

Personal Evaluation

Corroborating the evaluations of the students, I felt the seminar went very well from an educational perspective. The discussion was lively and stayed on topic throughout the class. The students seemed to pick up on what I was trying to communicate, as evidenced by their comments. I was encouraged by the responses of the students during and after class and feel I was successful in meeting my goals and objectives as outlined in chapter four. I believe this course could be a benefit to the preacher desiring to teach the great doctrines of the Bible to a people hungry for the meat of God’s Word.

Looking back, the material from this class could be presented in two separate lectures of sixty minutes each. However, this particular class lasted seventy-five minutes but did not feel rushed or incomplete. I was able to cover everything that I had planned.³⁴⁷ Additional time would have been beneficial in doing concrete work in a few biblical passages to illustrate the process of preparing a doctrinal sermon. However, my goal in preparing chapter four was to give the teacher of a first-year homiletics class the necessary materials to discuss aspects of homiletics particular to doctrinal preaching. It is unlikely that such a teacher would spend two class periods on this single topic. Therefore, the solution to present the most needed material within the parameters of a single class would be to excise some of that material.

³⁴⁷ There were several items in chapters three and four that I would have liked to have added to the class but that would not be feasible in even two classes.

Doctrinal sermons are rare. At the beginning of the class, the students were asked to remember the last doctrinal sermon they had preached or had heard preached. No such sermon came to mind. The contemporary evangelical church must be taught the very foundations on which it rests and works. The alternative is to work in the midst of a people that know what they are to do but do not know what they are to believe, which renders their actions empty and meaningless. When preachers begin to understand the importance of teaching doctrine and the benefits of equipping their flock with these great foundational truths of Scripture, the people of God are better able to accomplish the mission God has set before them. The steadfastness of Christian liberalism demands that our people know the tenets of the Christian faith. The rise and spread of Islam demands that our people know what the Bible teaches in order to combat attacks on Scripture. The increase in materialistic secular humanism demands that our people know God desires much more for them than their simple happiness. Instead, God desires that people know Him, and that knowledge is found by learning what He has revealed to us in His Word. As quoted earlier by Richard Owen Roberts, “If the preacher is called by men, he may sensibly give those who called him what they want, but what if the preacher is called by God? How can he dare speak less than all the truth of God?”³⁴⁸

³⁴⁸ Richard Owen Roberts, “Preaching that Hinders,” 1998, n.d., <http://www.graceonlinelibrary.org/etc/prINTER-friendly.asp?ID=341> (accessed April 14, 2006).

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VITA

Jeffrey Allen Spry was born in Statesville, North Carolina, on November 28, 1966. He grew up in Hiddenite, North Carolina, and graduated from Alexander Central High School in Taylorsville, North Carolina in 1985. Rev. Spry graduated from North Carolina State University in 1989, with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Speech-Communications.

After working several months as the interim youth pastor at his home church (East Taylorsville Baptist Church), Mr. Spry enrolled at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina in the summer of 1991. He earned his Master of Divinity degree in 1994. Upon graduation, Mr. Spry served two years as the Minister of Youth at Mt. Vernon Baptist Church in Raleigh, North Carolina. He was ordained into the gospel ministry while at this church.

In September 1995, Mr. Spry moved to Kingsport, Tennessee to serve as the Associate Pastor/Minister of Youth at West Colonial Hills Baptist Church. He served almost six years in Kingsport before moving back to Statesville in May 2001, to his current position as Minister of Education at Western Avenue Baptist Church.

Pastor Spry married Ambra Dyson in 1990, and they now have four children: Emma (1994), A.J. (1996), Abby (1998), and Joey (2001). Mr. Spry was enrolled in the Doctor Ministry track “The Preacher and the Message” from 2004 through 2007. The degree Doctor of Ministry from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Massachusetts, will be awarded in May 2007.